



**Homicide Investigation Tracking System  
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# **CASE MANAGEMENT for Missing Children Homicide Investigation**

May 2006

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Attorney General of Washington**

**&**

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Office of Juvenile Justice and  
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# INVESTIGATIVE CASE MANAGEMENT FOR MISSING CHILDREN HOMICIDES: REPORT II

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
OFFICE OF JUVENILE JUSTICE AND  
DELINQUENCY PREVENTION

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Cases of abducted and missing children found murdered continue to traumatize victims' families and friends and the public. While these cases are still quite rare, with the amount of national and international media attention they are given, we too quickly recognize the victims' names.

Our first research into this subject was “undertaken in an effort to better understand these types of murders and to identify investigative techniques and strategies that will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the criminal investigations and the apprehension rate of murderers who abduct children.” This follow-up research continues that effort.

We collected 175 solved cases and added them to the original data set. We obtained the new cases from agencies of all sizes in the United States and even went to some states not included in the original survey.

The additional cases are reflective and supportive of the original report with several significant and definite differences between the first study and this one. With more killers identified, we find that the relationships between them and their victims change from strangers to an almost equal likelihood of being friends/acquaintances. The probability of the killer's name coming up during the first week of the investigation decreases. Another significant change is the increase of the use of pornography by killers as a trigger. This should not be surprising, given the overwhelming sexual motivation of killers in these cases.

Victims continue to be females slightly over 11 years of age, leading normal lives and living with normal families – typical low-risk victims. The initial contact between the victim and killer is still within ¼ mile of the victim’s residence.

The killers remain around 27 years old and are predominately unmarried, with half of them living either alone or with their parents. Half of them are unemployed, and those who are employed work in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations.

More than half of these cases are initially reported to a law enforcement agency as a “missing child.” Fast action is necessary since there is typically over a two-hour delay in making the initial missing child report, and the vast majority of the abducted children *who are murdered* are dead within three hours of the abduction.

One question answered by this research is this: What can we tell parents to help them protect their children? Even though child abduction murders are rare, parents must eliminate, or minimize, the opportunity for their children to become victims. We need to tell parents that if their child is unaccounted for, *call the police immediately.*

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Child abduction murder is every parent's worst nightmare. To compound the problem, child abduction murders are incredibly difficult to solve and deeply impact law enforcement officials involved in the investigation. According to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), abductions resulting in a child's death present many investigative and emotional obstacles for law enforcement officers (National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2000). Hanfland, Keppel, and Weis (1997) state that the rarity of child abduction murders, even among criminal homicides, and their complex, emotion-laden, high profiles, make them extremely difficult to investigate.

The 1979 abduction of seven-year-old Etan Patz and the 1981 abduction and murder of six-year-old Adam Walsh terrified parents throughout the nation. As a result of the notoriety of these cases, inflated and unsubstantiated numbers of missing children were widely reported to be over 2 million per year. The number of children who were abducted and then murdered was erroneously reported to be as high as 5,000 per year (National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2000).

The public outcry over concern for the safety of America's children contributed to the establishment of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children by the United States Congress. To the contrary, careful research has shown that between 40 and 150 incidents of child abduction murder occur each year, which is less than one half of one percent of the murders committed nationally. On average, there is one child abduction murder for every 10,000 reports of a missing child (Finklehor, Hotaling, & Sedlak, 1992).

### *Missing and Abducted Children Statistics*

Missing children cases are typically placed into five categories: family abduction, nonfamily abduction, runaways, throwaway or abandoned children, and children who become lost or injured (Baker, Burgess, Rabun, & Nahirny, 2002). In 1988, an estimated 354,100 family abductions occurred. Forty-six percent of those abductions involved concealment of a child, out of state transportation, or the intent to keep the child indefinitely or to permanently alter custody. During this period, an estimated 3,200 to 4,600 nonfamily abductions were known to police (Finklehor et al., 1992). Unfortunately, less than 5% of those types of cases are reported to police (Hanfland, et al., 1997), and they are more likely to result in harm or death. Approximately 200 to 300 of them were stereotypical kidnappings in which the child was transported a distance of more than 50 feet or kept over night. An estimated 446,700 children ran away during this period, and approximately 127,100 children were told to leave their home or were abandoned (Finklehor et al., 1992).

Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult to gather accurate information on child abduction for a variety of reasons. Existing studies on child abduction are limited in scope, and there are discrepancies in the statistical information produced. Boudreaux, Lord, and Etter (2000) propose an explanation for the deficiencies in data on child abduction:

First, a number of highly publicized stranger abduction cases in the early 1980s resulted in a social climate of heightened concern and emotion regarding the safety of children. This yielded overestimated initial incidence rates of child abduction (Best & Thibodeau, 1997; Finklehor et al., 1990). Second, early statistics combined many different types of child abduction (e.g., family and nonfamily abductions) and age groups of children (e.g., preteen and teenaged children), impeding researchers' abilities to identify specific critical issues and draw clear conclusions regarding the dynamics of child abduction. Third, many child abductions are not reported to law enforcement agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) or child assistance agencies such as the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC). Finally, data collection has been hindered by variations in state laws (e.g., definitions) and the use of different data collection methods. Locating child abduction case files within law enforcement agencies can be particularly cumbersome because abductions may be filed under other crime categories (e.g., homicide and sexual assault). (p. 64)

## *Definitions*

There is no consistent, standard social scientific definition of child abduction. According to Fass (1999, p. 9), “our definition of the crime (even, indeed, the courts’ definition) has been historically derived.” According to Boudreaux et al. (2000), a single definition is problematic for two reasons:

(a) there is no single accepted definition of child abduction (i.e., the legal definitions of the terms child and abduction can vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction), and (b) there are different forms of child abduction, each with inconsistent terms, which if not specifically defined, can cause confusion (e.g., parental abduction, family abduction, stereotypical abduction, missing children, and kidnapped children). (p. 64)

In addition, legal definitions of child abduction vary widely across jurisdictions.

Finklehor et al. (1992) propose that the definition of child abduction should be “the coerced unauthorized movement of a child, the detention of a child, or the luring of a child for the purposes of committing another crime” (p. 228). The National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMAART) (2002) defines stereotypical kidnapping as: “A nonfamily abduction perpetrated by a slight acquaintance or stranger in which a child is detained overnight, transported at least 50 miles, held for ransom or abducted with intent to keep the child permanently, or killed” (p. 2) and nonfamily abduction as:

(1) An episode in which a nonfamily perpetrator takes a child by the use of physical force or threat of bodily harm or detains the child for a substantial period of time (at least 1 hour) in an isolated place by the use of physical force or threat of bodily harm without lawful authority or parental permission, or (2) an episode in which a child younger than 15 or mentally incompetent, and without lawful authority or parental permission, is taken, detained or voluntarily accompanies a nonfamily perpetrator who conceals the child’s whereabouts, demands ransom, or expresses the intention to keep the child permanently. (p. 2)

There has been disagreement over the amount of distance required to transport a child in order to establish an abduction (Finklehor et al., 1992). According to Forst and Blomquist

(1991), some jurisdictions follow the “any movement” rule, while some jurisdictions abide by the “incidental rule” in which movement in the context of another crime is incidental. To add to the confusion, some definitions depend on the motivation of the killer, and there is even disagreement about the definition of child (Lanning, 1995). The confusion and ambiguity regarding definitions contribute significantly to difficulties in collecting rigorous data on child abduction murder. However, those obstacles are not insurmountable.

### **Summary**

This report discusses the findings from a research project which examined the investigations of more than 800 child abduction murders. The report is particularly salient to homicide detectives who are confronted with an unsolved murder case involving child abduction. Results from this study will help police investigators identify strategies and implement tactics to focus investigations that will improve their ability to solve child abduction murder cases.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The data used in this study were collected through a cooperative agreement between the Washington State Attorney General's Office and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, United States Department of Justice. The objective of the collaborative research project was to examine murders of abducted children. The data set will be referred to as the Child Abduction Murder (CAM) data set. This report, the second of two, updates the data and findings of a prior three-year research project that examined the investigations of murders of more than 600 abducted children. The findings of the previous study are referred to in this study as the first-stage findings and were originally published as *Investigative Case Management for Missing Children Homicides* (Hanfland et al., 1997). The first-stage study, as well as the second-stage data collection and analysis, were conducted by criminal justice professionals with extensive murder investigation and research backgrounds.

#### ***Child Abduction Murder Data***

The CAM data were collected from 227 municipal police department and county sheriff's offices in the United States with a service population of 100,000 or more, or that had fifteen or more murders reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Uniform Crime Report (UCR) in 1987 (Hanfland et al., 1997). The department head, detective division commander, or a detective of each of the agencies meeting the above criteria was contacted by telephone and asked to participate in the data collection project. To follow up, an introductory letter and a formal request for case information was mailed to identified agencies, with a resulting initial response rate of 75% (Hanfland et al., 1997).

An additional teletype was sent to each police agency in the United States at three different time intervals on different days of the week, with a request to contact the coordinator of the project. Basic screening information was then recorded about the cases. Additional methods were employed to identify relevant cases for the study. Appropriate state and federal agencies were contacted and asked for case information. Homicide detectives across the country were also contacted for additional information (Hanfland et al., 1997).

Initially, data were collected by interviews with the detectives and the review of investigative case files from 1,025 cases. Responses were received from both large and small agencies and departments. The agencies were representative of all regions of the country, covering 44 states. Of the original 1,025 cases, 621 were found to meet the criteria established for inclusion in the original data collection collaboration (Hanfland et al., 1997). The second stage of the research, described in this report, was designed to expand the original CAM data set. Over a number of months, more than 200 additional cases have been collected, resulting in 833 child abduction murder cases from 1968 to 2002. The additional cases came from municipal police departments and county sheriff's offices of all sizes.

### ***Case Criteria***

The cases of murder in the original CAM data set were chosen for inclusion based on the following criteria:

1. The victim was *younger than* 18 years old (except as described in #3 below), whose body had been recovered; or if the body had not been recovered, the killer was identified, tried, and convicted.

2. The police agency receiving the initial contact about the case, whether as a missing, abducted, runaway, or dead body case, acted on the premise that abduction was a possibility.
3. The case was part of a series in which at least one victim in the series met the above stated criteria (Hanfland et al., 1997, p. 14).

Additionally, cases were included that were not considered “closed” in the traditional sense. If the reporting agency believed that abduction was a possibility, and began investigating the case as a child abduction, it was included in the data set. The murders of abducted children to be examined in the second-stage research were selected from the CAM data set based on the following criteria: the victim was 17 years old or *younger*, whose body had been recovered; or if the body had not been recovered, the killer was identified, tried, and convicted. A total of 735 cases met all of the criteria and were the focus of analysis.

### ***Data Collection Instrument***

The CAM data collection instrument was designed by homicide investigators Kenneth Hanfland and Dr. Robert D. Keppel, and criminologist Dr. Joseph G. Weis. It was used to collect information on 412 items representing the essential characteristics of the murder of an abducted child and of its investigation (See Hanfland et al., 1997). The instrument was designed to evaluate the criminal investigation process, including the initial response of the police agency, basic investigation, extended investigation, physical evidence, geographical considerations, and victim and killer information. It was field tested on ten cases of child abduction resulting in murder, after which a few changes were made.

### ***Data Integrity***

After the data collection instrument was received from participating agencies, it was reviewed for validity and internal consistency. The data were then entered into a database designed specifically for the project. To ensure data integrity, a printout was generated from each new computer record, and was visually compared with the original data collection instrument. Any necessary corrections were made by the data entry clerk, and the resulting printout and the original data collection instruments were given to the project coordinator for an additional review for errors. Any additional errors were corrected, and the form was placed in a file (Hanfland et al., 1997).

### ***Resulting Data***

The data set used for this research was collected with the purpose of determining proper and effective avenues of investigation in missing and abducted children cases. In order to determine which factors were effective investigation tools, information on solved cases was collected for this report. Information on unsolved cases was also collected to examine the differences between solved and unsolved cases. Thirty-five percent of the cases of child murder from the original CAM data set were unsolved at the time the data were collected. The original CAM data set contained 577 case investigations with a total of 621 victims (some cases had multiple victims) and 419 killers. Of the 735 cases analyzed for this report, 27.4% were unsolved at the time of data collection.

### ***Definitions***

Defining the terms used in this research project was critical. In order to select appropriate variables for analysis in our study, certain terminology was defined: abduction, components of

the murder incident, time and distance intervals, and solved cases. Once the terminology was defined and the proper parameters set, appropriate variables were selected for statistical analysis.

***Abduction.*** For purposes of this research, abduction was defined as:

1. The victim was kidnapped.
2. The victim was detained and his/her freedom of movement was restricted.
3. A victim of domestic violence was reported by the family (or someone else) as a missing child.
4. The police were initially of the opinion that the victim was taken or held against his or her will, whether or not that turned out to be the case in the end (Hanfland et al., 1997).

***Components of the Murder Incident.*** Each of these components occurs in a murder, and therefore each is important to a murder investigation. The components are defined as:

1. The Victim Last Seen Site (VLS) was defined as the location where and time when the victim was last seen. The VLS was determined from eyewitness information and records indicating when and where the victim was last seen alive.
2. The Initial Contact Site (IC) was defined as the place where and time when the killer initially contacted the victim. The IC was established from evidence indicating that the killer first met the victim at a certain time and at a specific location during the course of the murder incident.
3. The Murder Site (MS) was defined as the place where and time when the victim sustained the death-producing injuries.
4. The Body Recovery Site (BR) was defined as the location where and time when police, medics, or witnesses found the victim, dead or alive, prior to transportation to a medical facility or morgue (Keppel, 1992; Keppel & Weis, 1993a).

*Solvability.* In the CAM data set, solvability was defined and measured two ways: “Has the killer been arrested, or does probable cause exist for an arrest?” and “Has the investigation resulted in a conviction?” For the analysis here, solvability was based on investigations resulting in an arrest. Cases with a “Yes” to the question “Has the killer been arrested, or does probable cause exist for an arrest?” at the time of coding were considered “solved”; cases with a “No” to that question were considered “unsolved.” Cases with “Unknown” as the answer to the question were considered to have missing data and were not included in the analysis.

### *Purpose of the Study*

According to Hanfland et al. (1997), the rarity of these types of cases has allowed a body of “commonly held beliefs” to develop that has little to no basis in fact. Hence detectives, case managers, police executives, and the media sometimes operate with false assumptions and misperceptions. Homicide investigators, through no fault of their own, sometimes fail to realize that the investigations of the murders of abducted children are very different from the other murders they usually investigate. Consequently, they sometimes make decisions about the direction of the investigation that are not “high percentage” choices. For example, some detectives believe that in any murder of a child the logical suspect is a parent and, therefore, they devote a considerable amount of resources to prove that belief. But this research shows that the parents are the least likely suspects in an abduction murder of a child. This kind of false assumption is made, in part, from lack of experience with these types of cases and because there is very little empirical research on these types of child murders and their investigations from which detectives can draw guidance. This research will help investigators make those decisions, identify the strategies, and implement the tactics that will lead to the more certain and timely capture of the killers of abducted children.

## *Data Analysis*

Throughout the report data are presented as simple percentages. Often comparisons are made with “all murder cases” and, at times, with “all child murders,” which include domestic child abuse murders, mutual combat murders, and others that do not involve abduction. Percentages are used to provide a sense of how often or how rarely a characteristic or circumstance can be expected in these types of cases. The logic is that knowing the “spread” will help the detective make better decisions and prioritize courses of action. In most cases, simple descriptive frequencies were run on appropriate variables. Where the impact of a variable on solvability was examined, a cross-tabulation was performed to test statistical significance.

The CAM data set utilized for the second stage research consists of 833 child abduction murders. Of those cases, 735 victims are 17 years old or younger, with 516 of those victims being single-victim murder cases rather than part of a series. Of the 735 cases analyzed, 27.4% remained unsolved at the time of data collection. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the CAM data set that was used as the basis for the data analysis discussed in this report.

**Table 1**

### *CAM Data Set*

	All Cases in CAM Data set		Victims ≤17-Years-Old	
	N	%	N	%
Solved	589	74.1	527	72.6
Unsolved	206	25.9	199	27.4
Disposition	38	4.6	9	1.2
Unknown				
Total N	833		735	

## CHAPTER III

### VICTIMS

#### Introduction

The existing research on the rarity of child abduction murders, particularly those committed by non-family killers, shows clearly that most law enforcement jurisdictions in the United States will not be called on to investigate a child abduction murder. In fact, most homicide investigators will never investigate a child abduction murder over their entire career. However, it is prudent for investigators to be prepared. These investigations can put enormous strain on even the best prepared detectives, investigations, and jurisdictions. Their typically emotion-laden, volatile, high-profile characteristics present unique challenges to law enforcement.

#### *Initial Police Involvement*

Police involvement in the child abduction murder investigations in this study began with the report and identification of the victim as a “missing child” in 60.2% of the cases. The case investigation was initiated by the recovery of a dead body in 20.3% of the cases. Only 8.5% of the investigations began as reports of a runaway child, and 9.7% as abduction investigations.

As illustrated in Table 2, most reports to the police of a missing, runaway, or abducted child were made relatively soon after the child was missed. Of the children reported missing, 19.6% of the victims were reported missing “immediately,” 42.9% within two hours, and 86.6% within 24 hours of being missed. Two hours lapsed before reports were made in 56.2% of the cases, and at least a whole day passed in 12.5% of the cases. Unfortunately, 1.0% of cases never had a missing person report filed.

**Table 2**

*Percent of Missing Children Reports within Time Periods*

Case Reported to Police	%
Immediately	19.6
Within 1 Hour	27.5
Within 2 Hours	42.9
Within 4.5 Hours	68.4
Within 24 Hours	86.6
> 24 Hours	99.0

These reporting delays are important to the course of the investigation. The data show that delays are much more critical in child abduction murders than in other types of investigations, because missing children who *are* murdered are killed quickly after their abduction.

***When an Abducted Child is Killed***

Missing children were killed within a very short period of time after their abduction. Table 3 illustrates that 46.8% of the victims were dead within one hour after the abduction, 76.2% within three hours, and 88.5 % within 24 hours after being abducted. There is a misconception that killers keep children alive for long periods of time after an abduction. Clearly, this misconception is not supported by the data. Hours and even minutes are critical in an abducted child investigation. While the murder of an abducted child is rare, immediate reporting of the abduction and swift investigative measures may ensure that the child is recovered alive.

**Table 3**

*When an Abducted Child is Killed*

Time Period	%
< 1 Hour	46.8
Within 3 Hours	76.2
Within 24 Hours	88.5
Within 7 Days	97.9
Within 30 Days	100.0

The dictum that the first 24 to 48 hours of an investigation are the most critical must be modified in child abduction cases. An absent child should be reported to authorities immediately. Police should concentrate their investigative resources as quickly as possible once a child is reported missing. Swift action by law enforcement will increase the odds that a child is found alive; and if the child is murdered, it will increase the probability that the killer is caught. In addition to information about the time lapse between when a child is missing and when the absence is reported to police, this research identified unique characteristics of child abduction murder victims. This information will assist investigators in identifying and differentiating potential murder victims from the vast majority of missing children who eventually turn up alive and well. This information will help investigators prioritize investigative resources.

**Victims Overview**

The typical child abduction murder victim was a white (74.5%) female (74.0%), approximately 11 years old (M=11.52). They were predominantly from a middle class (35.2%) or “blue collar” (35.8%) family, living in an urban (29.3%) or suburban (35.2%) neighborhood, in a single-family residence (71.1%). The victim’s relationship with family was good (49.8%), and the family situation was not considered high risk (83.5%). In summary, the typical child

abduction murder victim was an 11-year-old, white female from a middle class or “blue collar” family with good family relationships.

***Victim’s Race and Gender***

As found in the previous first-stage analysis, the race of child abduction murder victims is not significantly different from all murder victims — both are predominantly white. Table 4 illustrates this similarity.

**Table 4**

***Victim Race***

	Child Abduction	All Murders
White	74.5%	66.0%
Black	14.3%	17.0%
All Other	11.2%	17.0%

The gender of child abduction murder victims differs significantly from the gender of victims in all child murders and murders in general. The first-stage findings indicated that child murder victims were more likely to be female (55.0%), while only 38.0% of murder victims in general are female. But the second-stage analysis indicated that child abduction murder victims were predominantly female (74.0%). Table 5 shows the differences in gender by type of murder.

**Table 5**

***Victim Gender***

	Child Abduction Murders	All Child Murders	All Murders
Female	74.0%	55.0%	38.0%
Male	26.0%	45.0%	62.0%

### *Victim's Age*

According to Hanfland et al. (1997), approximately one-half of all children who are murdered are between the ages of 15 and 17 years old. Among child abduction murder victims, only 22.2% of victims were older teenagers between the ages of 16 and 17 years old. Table 6 illustrates the age distribution of child abduction murder victims. The mean age of victims was 11.52 years. About 10% of the victims were children five years old and younger, a group smaller than one might expect, based on the common perception that it is “little kids” or “young children” who are most vulnerable and selected most often as victims. Older children (6-9), preteens (10-12), young teens (13-15), and older teens (16-17) each constituted about 20% of the victims of child abduction murders. Only a slight majority of the victims in this sample (52.3%) were not yet teenagers at the time of their death.

**Table 6**

*Distribution of Victims by Age Groups*

Victim Age Group	%
1 to 5 years old	10.1
6 to 9 years old	21.5
10 to 12 years old	20.7
13 to 15 years old	25.5
16 to 17 years old	22.2

### *Lifestyle of Victims*

There is also a public misconception that children who are killed during an abduction are particularly vulnerable or high-risk victims, but most of the victims (67.5%) were described by those who know them as “normal kids.” On the other hand, approximately one-third (32.5%) of the victims were not considered average kids. Only 16.9% of the victims were described as street kids and 13% as runaways. As one might expect, those types of victims are typically teenagers rather than younger children. Community resources focused on runaway children and at-risk children who are prone to live on the street would be prudent preventive measures.

### **Summary**

It is vitally important to identify which children are most at risk for child abduction murder. It is also imperative that the killer is examined and, hopefully, better understood. The next chapter discusses the characteristics of the typical child abduction murderer.

## CHAPTER IV

### KILLERS

#### Introduction

Just as child abduction murder victims are unique, their killers are unique among murderers. Those who kill abducted children share many characteristics with other types of murderers, but they differ in important ways that suggest a different etiology to their predatory behavior. Their unique characteristics call for different investigative strategies. This chapter will focus on the personal and social attributes and behavior of child abduction killers.

#### *Killer Attributes*

In addition to their choice of victims—the substantial overselection of female victims — child abduction killers are unique among murderers in general. Hanfland et al. (1997) characterized child abduction murderers as “social marginals.” Child abduction killers are not:

active, successful participants in mainstream, conventional social life, but, rather, they occupy a position in society that is, indeed, on the “edge, brink, border, precipice, or margin.” They are not integrated, personally or socially, into the kinds of relationships or activities that produce and sustain effective self or social controls. Their personal and social attributes establish and define their social marginality. (Hanfland et al., 1997)

#### *Killer's Age*

The mean age of child abduction murderers is 27.8 years old. Table 7 shows the distribution of child abduction killers by age group.

**Table 7**

*Distribution of Killers by Age Groups*

Killer Age Group	%
< 18 years old	12.2
18 to 20 years old	21.2
21 to 25 years old	22.3
26 to 30 years old	22.3
31 to 40 years old	23.4
> 40 years old	10.1

Only 12.2% of the killers were juveniles (under 18), and only 10.1% were over 40 years old.

The great majority of killers (65.8%) were young adult men between 18 and 30 years old. The oldest killer in this sample was 61 years old, with the youngest killer being 9 years old. Contrary to the belief that these killers are “dirty old men,” the evidence shows that they are more similar in age to killers in general — young adults.

***Killer's Race***

The race of the killers in this sample was predominantly white (69.8%). Only 19.1% were black, and the remaining 11.0% were other racial/ethnic groups, when adjusted for the missing race identification of 158 killers. The results on the race of killers supported the earlier first-stage findings, that there were no important differences in race between child abduction killers and other killers. Table 8 shows the racial breakdown of child abduction murder killers compared to murderers in general.

**Table 8***Killer Race*

	Child Abduction	All Murders
White	69.8%	75.0%
Black	19.1%	20.0%
All Other	11.0%	5.0%

*Killer's Gender*

Murder is a predominantly male phenomenon, with the great majority of victims and killers being male. The first-stage research observed that child abduction murderers were even more likely to be male — 98.5% of child abduction murder killers were males, compared to 87% of murderers in general. By including the additional cases collected in stage two of the study, 96.1% of the killers were male, still a substantial overrepresentation of male killers. These murders were carried out almost exclusively by males, and were perpetrated typically against young females. There were also a number of indicators of *social marginality* among these killers, including marital status, residential status, employment and occupation, lifestyle, problem behavior, and criminal behavior.

*Killer's Marital Status*

Only 16.9% of the killers were married at the time they committed the murder, and another 13.2% were divorced. Accordingly, 83.0% of the killers had no intimate attachments or bonds with another person *at the time* of the abduction and subsequent murder. The marital status of the killers is illustrated in Table 9.

**Table 9***Marital Status of Killer*

Marital Status	%
Single	69.8
Married	16.9
Divorced	13.2

*Killer's Residential Status*

Contrary to perceptions that killers who kill children are “loners,” only 17.1% of the killers lived alone, while 74.8% lived with someone. It is perhaps a little unusual that 33.2% of them lived with their parents. Table 10 describes the killers' living arrangements.

The killers in this sample also changed their residence frequently. The majority of them moved at least once within the five years preceding the murder (79.7%). Of this group, 44.5% of killers changed residences three or more times, and 19.7% moved five or more times.

**Table 10***Living Arrangements of Killer*

Living Arrangement	%
Living with Parents	33.2
Living Alone	17.1
Living with Spouse and/or Children	17.1
Living with Girlfriend/Boyfriend	14.2
Living with Other Roommates	10.3
Other	8.2

### *Killer's Employment and Occupation Status*

This transient nature may be related to their uneven employment history. Approximately half (48.3%) of child abduction murderers were unemployed at the time of the murder; and if they were employed, they worked in unskilled or semi-skilled labor occupations. Table 11 describes the most common occupations of killers at the time they committed the murder.

**Table 11**

#### *Killer Occupations*

Occupation	%
Construction Worker	26.4
Food Industry Worker	7.5
Service Industry	6.9
Student	6.6
Truck Driver	6.6
Auto Maintenance	3.7

#### *Killer's Lifestyles*

Only 10.1% of the killers were described as “model” citizens, and a mere 3.9% were active in church or civic groups. In fact, 20.1% of the killers were on probation or parole for another offense at the time they committed the child abduction murder. Many of them (30.2%) were described as “strange” by others who knew them, 14.7% were described as “friendly to children,” and 16.0% were considered reclusive. Table 12 reveals other behaviors of the killers that are considered outside the norm by our society. A number of them abused alcohol (24.6%), used and abused drugs (22.1%), or were sexually promiscuous (15.5%), according to others who

knew them and characterized their behaviors and identity before they were identified as a child abduction killers.

**Table 12**

*Perceived Lifestyle of Killers*

Perceived Lifestyle	%
Described as “Strange”	30.2
Alcohol Abuser	24.6
Drug User/Abuser	22.1
Reclusive	16.0
Sexually Promiscuous	15.5
Friendly To Children	14.7
Transient/Semi-transient	11.9

*Killer’s Past Behavior*

Child abduction murderers experience more serious personal behavioral problems than the typical killer. Over three-fourths of them (78.5%) had a recognized and identified history of at least one serious behavioral problem. The child abduction murderers in this study differed significantly from general murderers in the extent of their problems (Table 13). Almost one-third (30.4%) of the killers of abducted children suffered from “sexual problems,” in contrast to an extremely low rate among killers in general murder (3.0%). The former were ten times more likely than the latter to have a history of identified sexual problems.

**Table 13***Personal Problems of the Killers*

	Child Abduction	All Murders
Sexual Problems	30.4%	3.0%
Alcohol Problems	23.8%	27.0%
Drug Problems	22.3%	14.0%
Mental Problems	18.4%	13.0%

*Killer's Prior Crimes*

In addition to victim and killer demographic and behavioral characteristics, information was collected regarding the killers' criminal background and motivation to commit murder. A large percent of the murderers had a substantial history of prior crimes against children (46.0%). Table 14 shows the types of crimes committed against children by these killers.

**Table 14***Prior Crimes Against Children By Killers*

Prior Crimes	%
Sexual Assault (Non-Rape)	21.0
Rape (or attempt)	13.3
Murder (or attempt)	10.7
Kidnap	6.5
Assault	6.1

These killers clearly demonstrated violent predispositions toward children prior to the child abduction murder. Sexual assaults (21.0%) and rapes (13.3%) were the prior crimes most frequently committed against children. Incredibly, the murder of another child was committed previously by 10.7% of the killers in this study. An additional 6.5% had also previously

kidnapped children. Sexual assault of the victim occurred in 62.8% of these child abduction murder cases — those easily characterized as acts of violent, sexual predation on children.

### *Custody Status*

In spite of the substantial evidence of prior crimes of violence against children, approximately half (50.8%) of child abduction killers, like murderers in general (66.0%), were *not* in any “official custody status” at the time of the extant murder. A slightly higher percent of child abduction killers (20.1%) were either on parole or probation when they killed as compared to 17.0% of all murderers. While most child abduction killers may not have been immediately accessible in the custodial system, they were slightly more likely than other murderers to be found in the active files of the correctional or judicial systems.

### **Summary**

Child abduction killers can be characterized as social marginals who have a propensity to commit crimes of violence against children. Most of them exhibit weak social bonds to conventional contexts, relationships, and activities--strong predictors of involvement in crime. Individuals with weak social controls are more likely to commit child abduction murders given the appropriate motivation and opportunity. The victim-killer relationship discussed in the next chapter illustrates in greater detail the opportunities available to the killers.

## CHAPTER V

### VICTIM-KILLER RELATIONSHIP

#### Introduction

It is vitally important to understand the demographics of both the victim and killer in the study of the murder of abducted children. However, it may be more important to understand the victim-killer relationship in order to protect our children. The following chapter will present an overview of the relationship between the child abduction murder victims and their killers.

#### *Victim-Killer Relationship*

Child abduction murderers were strangers to the victim in 44.4% of the cases, and were family friends or acquaintances in 41.9% of the cases. The killer was an intimate or family member of the victim in 13.7% of the cases (Table 15).

**Table 15**

#### *Victim-Killer Relationship*

Relationship	Child Abduction Murders	All Child Murders	All Murders
Stranger	44.4%	5.0%	20.0%
Friend/Acquaintance	41.9%	28.0%	42.0%
Family/Intimate	13.7%	67.0%	38.0%

The killers were strangers to the victim in 44.4% of the cases, in contrast to 5.0% of all child murders and 20.0% of murders in general. Victims are much more likely to be killed by family members in child murders (67.0%) than in child abduction murders (13.7%).

### *Victim-Killer Relationship by Age and Gender*

The victim-killer relationship was also examined by age and gender. The victim-killer relationship varied by the age and gender of the victim. Table 16 shows the victim-killer relationship for females by age group. The youngest females (1 to 5 years old) were most likely killed by a friend or an acquaintance (49.0%). In contrast, older female victims (10 to 17 years old) were more likely to be killed by strangers.

**Table 16**

#### *Female Victim-Killer Relationship, By Age Group*

Relationship	Victim Age Group				
	1-5	6-9	10-12	13-15	16-17
Stranger	15.7%	33.0%	41.6%	37.2%	40.2%
Friend/Acquaintance	49.0%	39.4%	32.7%	28.4%	22.7%
Family/Intimate	17.6%	8.3%	11.9%	7.4%	14.4%
Unknown	17.6%	19.3%	13.9%	27.0%	22.7%

Table 17 shows the differences in the victim-killer relationships for males. The youngest victims (1 to 5 years old) were almost as likely to be killed by family members (34.8%) as they were by strangers (30.4%). The youngest victims were least likely to be killed by friends or acquaintances. The older male victims (16 to 17 years old) were almost as likely to be killed by strangers (41.9%) as friends or acquaintances (48.4%). In this sample, family or intimates did not kill male teenagers, but only younger boys.

**Table 17***Male Victim-Killer Relationship, By Age Group*

Relationship	Victim Age Group				
	1-5	6-9	10-12	13-15	16-17
Stranger	30.4%	36.7%	35.3%	28.6%	41.9%
Friend/Acquaintance	26.1%	34.7%	39.2%	40.0%	48.4%
Family/Intimate	34.8%	14.3%	7.8%	0%	0%
Unknown	8.7%	14.3%	17.6%	31.4%	9.7%

The overall victim-killer relationship by gender is shown in Table 18. Females were most often killed by strangers (35.9%), while males were most likely killed by friends or acquaintances (37.9%). Both genders were least likely to be killed by a family member or intimate.

**Table 18***Victim-Killer Relationship by Victim Gender*

Relationship	Victim Gender	
	Female	Male
Stranger	35.9%	34.7%
Friend/Acquaintance	32.0%	37.9%
Family/Intimate	11.1%	10.5%
Unknown	21.1%	16.8%

## **Summary**

The differences in the victim-killer relationship by age and gender of the victims can be more clearly seen when the different types of murders and modus operandi are examined in light of the research findings in the following chapter. The next chapter will detail the killer's motivation for abducting the child. In addition, how the killer selected the victim will be examined.

## CHAPTER VI

### KILLER MOTIVATION AND VICTIM SELECTION

#### Introduction

Surprisingly, over half (58.4%) of the prior crimes committed by a killer against children had a *modus operandi* (MO) that was similar to the extant murder. For example, a child abduction killer who lures the child away by asking for help locating a lost pet is very likely to lure away the next victim in a similar way. The similarities in MOs produced other surprises: they were most alike, by a large margin, in the “commission of the offense,” or the way the crimes were committed (Table 19). In the cases that had similar MOs, the priors were committed in similar ways — for example, the choice of weapon was the same across different crimes committed by a killer.

There is a misconception that child abduction killers are looking for a child with a certain appearance. Contrary to murderers in general, child abduction killers were much less likely to select certain types of victims based on personal characteristics. A mere 7.2% of prior crimes were committed against similar victims. The killers were even less likely (5.2%) to approach their victim in similar ways. Finally, 16.5% of the prior crimes against children were similar to the extant murder in the kinds of specific acts that were performed during the commission of the crimes. For example, the killer used rope to bind and control a kidnap victim, as well as the subsequent murder victim.

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

**Table 19**

*Modus Operandi (MO) Similarities Between Other Crimes And Extant Murder*

MO	%
Commission of the Crime	16.5
Victim Characteristics	7.2
Specific Acts Committed	5.7
Approach to Victim	5.2

***Sexual Motivation***

Child abduction murderers share a characteristic with classic serial killers — both show a sexual component to their motivation to kill. More than two-thirds (69.2%) of child abduction murders involved a sexual motive, compared to only 5% of all murders and 14% of child murders. Almost one-half (46.3%) of the child abduction murders were classified as rapes and 21.9% as other sexual assaults. As one would expect in these types of murders, a large group (27.8%) were kidnappings, which is approximately 15 times greater than in all child murders and 30 times greater than in murders in general.

Some of the kidnappings also included a secondary sexual component, because there was physical evidence that almost two-thirds (62.8%) of the child abduction murder victims had been sexually assaulted, compared to only 7% of all murder victims and 15.0% of all child murder victims. The dramatic differences in the role of sexual motivation and conduct across the different types of murder clearly demonstrate the unique role that sex plays in child abduction murders. The great majority of these killers would qualify as sexual predators in most states.

### *Pornography*

There is a common belief in our society that pornography plays an important role in the process of motivating sex killers and lust killers. Interestingly, approximately one-quarter of the killers in this study used pornography (24.8%), and pornography was a “trigger” for the murder in 20.7% of the cases. This was an increase in the use of pornography as a trigger over the 4% reported for the first-stage data. It may be that the role of pornography in the sexual motivation of these murders was more prevalent but was still not common. It could also reflect differences in the selection of the first- and second-stage cases. One explanation for the low reliance on pornography is that child abduction killers may have a predisposition to engage in these types of violent and sexual acts with children as a deep-seated element of their flawed characters, making the exposure to pornographic materials unnecessary in the process of “getting motivated” to commit the murder.

### *Crises and Stressors*

Some observers of murder have proposed that certain kinds of personal problems — usually revolving around employment or marriage — may serve as “precipitating crises” that contribute to the motivation of the killer. In the case of child abduction murders, there was evidence of at least one precipitating crisis (or stressor) in the life of the killer in 25.4% of the cases. What is striking is that of those cases, the usual crises or stressors emphasized in the literature did not seem to be as important as others that seemed to resonate with the character of the killers and with their choice of predominantly female victims. For example, only 4.9% involved marital problems, 3.8% involved employment problems, and 6.0% involved financial problems.

This research shows that 11.3% of the child abduction murderers had a “conflict with a female,” and 8.4% with “criminal/legal problems.” The majority of these killers had extensive criminal histories, so it is not surprising that their related criminal/legal problems might be implicated somehow in the motivation to commit murder. We also know that there was a dramatic, disproportionate preponderance (74.0%) of young, vulnerable, female victims.

### *Choosing and Controlling the Victim*

The child abduction murderers overwhelmingly chose their victims because the opportunity presented itself (40.3%). Killers rarely chose their victims for their physical characteristics (9.7%) or because of a prior relationship with the victim (14.4%). Killers had a specific motivation to murder a particular victim in only 12.7% of the cases.

**Table 20**

#### *How Killer Chose Victim*

Choice	%
Victim of Opportunity	40.3
Prior Relationship with Victim	14.4
Specific Motivation	12.7
Physical Characteristics	9.7

Table 21 indicates that some killers initiated contact with their victims through deception (27.3%) and others through normal activities (22.9%). Only 12.9% of the killers contacted their victims through other illegal or criminal activity. In 34.2% of the cases the manner of initial contact was unknown.

**Table 21***How Killer Initiated Contact with Victim*

Method	%
Through Deception	27.3
Through Normal Activity	22.9
Through Illegal/Criminal Contact	12.9
Other	2.7
Unknown	34.2

The initial victim-killer contact most often took place in a suburban (32.9%) area and least often in a rural area (16.7).

**Table 22***Area of Initial Victim-Killer Contact*

Area	%
Suburban	32.9
Urban	50.5
Rural	16.7

Table 23 illustrates the differences in area of initial contact by type of murder.

**Table 23**

*Area of Initial Victim-Killer Contact by Type of Murder*

Area	Child Abduction		
	Murders	All Child Murders	All Murders
Urban	50.5%	17.0%	31.0%
Suburban	32.9%	74.0%	58.0%
Rural	16.7%	9.0%	11.0%

Typically, killers came into contact with the victim because the killer lived in close proximity to the victim (26.3%). An additional 16.4% came into contact with their victim because of other criminal activity. Table 24 shows the reasons the killer was at the victim contact site.

**Table 24**

*Why Killer Was at the Victim Contact Site*

Reason	%
Lived in Area	26.3
Criminal Activity	16.4
Normal Social Activity	13.9
Normal Non-social Activity	10.2
Meeting Victim Intentionally	4.7
Other	2.2
Unknown	27.9

The majority of killers gained control over the victim by using direct physical assault (47.2%). An additional 2.1% used verbal threats, with deception (11.6%) and victim incapacity (11.1%) used equally as often to gain control of their victims. Table 25 illustrates the methods of control used by these child abduction murderers.

**Table 25**

*How Killer Gained Control of Victim*

Method	%
Direct Physical Assault	47.2
Deception	11.6
Victim Incapacity	11.1
Verbal Assault	2.1
Unknown	30.6

*Binding of Victim*

There is evidence that child abduction killers are 6 to 12 times more likely than other murderers to “bind” their victims. Child abduction killers bound their victims in one-fourth (24.0%) of the cases, compared to only 2.0% in child murders and 4.0% in all murders. The much more frequent binding of child abduction murder victims reflects both control and sexual elements. Binding a victim makes control easier, and for uncooperative, strong victims it may be absolutely necessary. For child victims, this control function of binding is less critical. But in these types of murders, with their strong sexual component, the binding (or “bondage”) is more likely to serve more primary and secondary sexual functions. These victims are being bound less to physically control them than to fulfill the sexual fantasies and needs of the killers.

The source of the binding material was known in 96.8% of the cases involving binding. In those known cases, 16.2% of the killers brought the binding material with them to the crime scene. This has evidentiary implications for matching binding material found in the possession of the killer after he is identified.

***Cause of Death***

Death by strangulation was the leading cause of death of victims (33.2%), followed by blunt force trauma (23.9%), and stabbing/cutting (23.3%). Firearms, a frequent cause of death in general murders, only accounted for 11.8% of child abduction murder victim deaths.

**Table 26**

***Cause of Death***

Cause	%
Strangulation – Ligature and Manual	33.2
Blunt Force Trauma	23.9
Stabbing/Cutting	23.3
Asphyxia – Unknown Means	12.2
Firearm	11.8
Drowning	3.7

Table 26 lists common causes of death for victims, and Table 27 compares the common causes of death in general murders and child murders findings by Hanfland et al. (1997) to the causes of death in this analysis.

**Table 27***Cause of Death by Type of Murder*

Cause of Death	Child Abduction		
	Murders	All Child Murders	All Murders
Strangulation	33.2%	13.0%	9.0%
Blunt Force Trauma	23.3%	37.0%	18.0%
Stabbing/Cutting	23.9%	9.0%	23.0%
Firearms	11.8%	16.0%	43.0%

*Unusual Acts*

There is a common belief that killers who commit murders that are out of the ordinary are involved in a variety of unusual acts during the murder incident, ranging from cult rituals, to “posing” victims, to grotesque mutilation. In general, the data suggest that child abduction murders are not characterized by unusual, bizarre, or weird acts and rituals. There is almost no evidence that unusual ceremonies or acts had been performed at the crime scene (e.g., evidence of ritual (1.1%), masochistic acts (1.1%), burnt candles, dead animals, satanic symbols). The extreme rarity of these kinds of acts in child abduction murders is consistent with what is found for all murder cases.

*Body Disposal/Recovery*

The geographic location of the body disposal site chosen by killers is shown in Table 28. These child abduction killers chose rural areas for the body disposal location in 52.6% of the cases.

**Table 28***Area of Body Recovery*

Area	%
Rural	52.6
Suburban	20.5
Urban	27.0

The choice of a rural location for body disposal contrasts with findings by Hanfland et al. (1997) for all murder cases (Table 29). Killers in general murders choose suburban body disposal locations in about half of all cases (54.0%) but rural locations in only in 22% of the murders.

**Table 29***Area of Body Recovery Site by Type of Murder*

Area	Child Abduction		
	Murders	All Child Murders	All Murders
Urban	27.0%	14.0%	25.0%
Suburban	20.5%	61.0%	54.0%
Rural	52.6%	26.0%	22.0%

The killers deliberately chose the body disposal location in 48.0% of cases. It was a random selection in 32.6% of cases. As shown in Table 30, killers were forced by circumstances to choose the body disposal location in only 10.4% of the murders.

**Table 30***How Killer Selected Body Disposal Site*

Selection	%
Deliberately Selected	48.0
Random/Arbitrary Choice	32.6
Forced by Circumstances	10.4

Killers concealed the victim's body in 55.4% of cases and were unconcerned with the location of the body in 36.4% of cases. As illustrated in Table 31, the victim's body was simply left in the open in only 8.1% of cases and was left in an unusual position even less often (3.2%).

**Table 31***How Killer Disposed of Body*

Selection	%
Concealed	55.4
Unconcerned	36.4
Open	8.1

*Post Offense Behavior*

After the murder was committed and the body disposed of, the killer apparently engaged in a variety of behaviors that are related to the murder, which for many of them constituted a prelude to apprehension and arrest. The killers did a number of things after the murder (Table 32). A surprising 23.7% of child abduction killers returned to the body disposal site. Some killers left town right after the murder (16.1%) or confided in someone about their involvement in the murder (16.1%). Some followed the case in the media (14.3%). Ten percent actually

interjected themselves into the murder investigation in some way. Each of the behaviors may provide valuable leads for investigators to pursue.

**Table 32**

*Post Offense Behavior of Killers*

Behavior	%
Returned to Body Disposal Site	23.7
Left Town	16.1
Confided in Someone	16.1
Followed Case in Media	14.3
Interjected Self Into Investigation	10.0
Contacted Victim's Family	9.7
Contacted Police or Media	9.7
Changed Residence	8.3

In 15% of the cases, the killer kept the body longer than necessary to dispose of it and kept it in convenient and accessible places where it could be concealed, moved quickly, and/or “played” with. The killer kept the body in his residence (53.0%), in his car (21.0%), or in a variety of other places within easy reach. However, contrary to beliefs about murderers, especially serial killers who prolong their relationship with the victim, these child abduction killers only held onto the bodies for very short periods of time. Of the bodies that were kept by the killer, 32.1% were in his possession for three hours or less and 56.6% for 24 hours or less. So it is likely that most of the bodies were being kept only until they could be disposed of safely. Only 15.1% of the bodies that were kept by the killer were in his possession for more than a week. It is likely that in these cases there was a reason for keeping the body other than delayed

disposal — for example, to play out sexual fantasies with the corpse or to treat it like a trophy.

And this is a very small number of cases.

More striking is the number of child abduction killers who returned to the body disposal site. Almost one-fourth (23.7%) of the killers returned to the body disposal site after a significant period of time. Of those killers who did return, an incredible 83.3% did so prior to the discovery of the body, and 33.1% did so within three days after the murder. Clearly, a significant proportion of child abduction killers returned to the body disposal site, particularly soon after the murder occurred. As one would expect, very few returned after the body had been discovered and reported in the media. But an opportunity exists — albeit for a short period of time — for investigators to observe potential suspects between the time the body is reported to the police and, then, made public by the media.

## CHAPTER VII

### INVESTIGATION

#### Introduction

The previous chapters detailed valuable information about the victims, killers, their relationship, the killers' motivation, and how the killers chose their victims. In addition to this information, variables relating to the actual investigation process may prove valuable to detectives. A descriptive analysis of the variables affecting abducted child murder investigations will be explored in the following sections.

#### *Police Refusal to Accept a Missing or Runaway Child Report*

The data for this study showed that a law enforcement agency refused to accept an initial report for a missing or runaway child in less than two percent (1.8%) of child abduction murder cases. Because this number was sufficiently small, it cannot be determined whether the refusal to accept the initial missing or runaway child report had any effect on the investigations. Fortunately, the refusal to accept an initial report about a missing or runaway child was rare.

#### *Multiple Police Agencies*

Some murder victims are reported to be missing from within one law enforcement agency's jurisdictional boundary, and the body is subsequently discovered within another jurisdiction. While this is not unusual, what has not been well understood is to what extent that actually happens. Of the murders studied in this project, 64% of the victim bodies were discovered within the jurisdictional boundaries of the law enforcement agency that received the initial missing/abduction report. In short, almost two-thirds of the victims apparently did not cross law enforcement jurisdictional boundaries in the course of events that led to the discovery

of the body. On the other hand, 36% of the killers transported victims and dumped their bodies in jurisdictions different from where they were first contacted, assaulted, or killed. It is a common belief that such crossing of jurisdictional lines would have a negative impact on the outcome of the investigation. What was found was that, while the investigation was at times made more complicated for the detectives, there is no statistical difference in the clearance rates between those cases that crossed jurisdictional lines and those that did not.

### *Unknowning Witnesses*

Unknowning witnesses are witnesses who saw some aspect of the crime but at the time did not *realize* that they were witnessing part of a crime or potential abduction. It was discovered that this is quite common — there were unknowing witnesses in 32.9% of the cases. This would indicate that a neighborhood or area canvass would be of great importance in generating investigative leads.

### *Neighborhood Canvass*

“Neighborhood canvass” means the checking, by police, around the area of the victim’s last known location and/or the location the victim was known to be going, or around any site determined to be important to the investigation, in an effort to locate witnesses or to obtain facts about the circumstances. This typically involves going from door to door, person to person. An area search differs from a neighborhood canvass in that the latter typically involves going from door to door to contact potential witnesses, while the former is more likely part of the actual search for the victim and/or physical evidence. These two activities may occur simultaneously or separately, depending on circumstances. They are separated here for greater specificity.

A neighborhood canvass was conducted within less than 2.5 hours of a report of an abducted or a missing child in 62.1% of the cases. A canvass was conducted in less than 12 hours in 70.4% of the cases. But in over 21% of reported abducted or missing children investigations, no neighborhood canvass was conducted.

What was not collected in this research was information on who actually conducted the neighborhood canvass. However, it is a common practice in law enforcement to have uniformed patrol officers conduct the initial neighborhood canvass. Whether or not this is done is usually a simple issue of manpower availability. Unfortunately, most police agencies do not have Standard Operating Procedures for these types of cases, and patrol officers frequently are not given specific guidance as to what to ask the people they interview. It is also unfortunate that in many cases there is no follow-up canvass by detectives.

On the surface, the lack of a neighborhood canvass may not appear to be a critical factor in these types of investigations. However, it may be one of the most critical factors uncovered in this research project, especially when combined with what we know from the data concerning murder incident sites. We know that the victim's last known location was usually very close to the site of the initial contact between the killer and the victim. When the police did not know the initial contact site, the solvability rate dropped to 23.9%. When the initial contact site was known, the solvability rate increased to 79.7%.

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

The initial neighborhood canvass is also an opportunity for law enforcement officials to put everyone contacted “on the record.” A useful technique in conducting a neighborhood canvass is to provide patrol officers and detectives printed questionnaires that include specific questions, including the identification of everyone who lives in each residence. The completion of these questionnaires facilitates easy reporting of the results of the interviews of each house/business, and the content of subsequent interviews can be compared with the initial statements. Such comparisons can identify inconsistent statements and persons who have left the area since the initial canvass. It is worth pointing out that in 33.5% of the cases examined in this research, a physical description of the killer was obtained *before* he was identified. In those cases the clearance rate increased by 15.0%.

### *Area Search*

The area most commonly searched (98% of the cases) was the area in which the victim was last seen. It was searched within five hours in 72.9% of the cases. Searching resulted in finding evidence or leads in 45.5% of the murders. Of course, when evidence or leads were found by searching, cases had a higher solution rate than those in which no evidence or leads were found.

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

For every child abduction murder a police agency handles, there could be hundreds to thousands of reports of a missing child. This issue is important because it is easy for officers responding to a missing child call to think in terms of a lost child, and not the possibility of an

abduction murder. A lost child is usually thought to be alive, not dead. With a “lost child” mindset, one could overlook the body of a murdered child that has been concealed or inadvertently destroy evidence when murder is not considered as a possibility.

There are examples of cases in which officers made contact with the killer at his residence and, unknown to the officers, the body of the victim was on the premises at that moment. While there is no way of knowing whether a body is in the residence of a potential witness while investigators are at the front door, in at least one of the cases, during a search of the killer’s residence, investigators missed discovering the body that was hidden in a box. The chances of such things happening are slight, but officers should always remain mindful of the possibility.

The research confirmed that the body of the victim is the single most important source of physical evidence that can be connected to the killer. It also told us that 55.4% of the victims’ bodies were concealed when they were disposed of by the killer. These two facts make a thorough area search very important in the investigation. (See the section on the Body Recovery Site for further discussion of investigative implications related to the area search.)

### *Who Discovered the Body of the Victim?*

It is important to examine who finds the body of a child abduction murder victim. Table 33 shows that in the majority of cases the victim’s body was found by an innocent passerby or by the police. The killer claimed to have “discovered” the body in about three percent (2.8%) of the cases.

**Table 33**

*Who Discovered Victim's Body*

Body Discovery	%
Passerby	55.3
Police	25.4
Search Party	5.9
Relative/Acquaintance of Victim	4.4
Killer	2.8
Fire Department/Aid Crew	2.2
Witness to Death	1.7

*Investigative Steps in the First 48 Hours*

The investigative activities of the critical first 24 to 48 hours of the murder investigations were classified into seven general categories, as listed in Table 34. Collecting information was by far the most common investigative activity (87.2%). Circumstances in the early phases of an abducted child murder case can vary from simply accepting a missing child report and conducting no immediate investigation, to immediately dispatching officers to the area and conducting a neighborhood canvass and an area search, to a full-scale crime scene investigation and arrest of the killer.

**Table 34**

*Major Investigative Steps in the First 48 Hours*

Investigative Step	%
Collected Information	87.2
Searched	51.4
Collected Evidence	40.3
Disseminated Information	24.8
Direct Contact With Killer	14.1
Organizational Changes	3.9
Other	3.8

*Police Contact with Killer*

Law enforcement contact with or knowledge of anyone who may physically be around some aspect of the murder, crime scene, or body disposal site is critical to investigations.

Alarming, the evidence shows that the police had contact with the killer about some aspect of the murder — *before* he became the prime suspect — in *half* of the cases. The police often do not realize or know that they have come that close to the killer — probably early in the investigation when many names are being recorded, interviews are being done, canvassing is taking place, records are being searched, tips are being received, and so on. Police need to know this when conducting the investigation of a child abduction murder — the killer’s name may be in their possession in a substantial proportion of cases, and probably early in the investigation.

Equally surprising, the data show that the killer’s *name* became known, not necessarily as the suspect, very early in the course of most investigations of child abduction murder. In 21.9% of the cases, the killer’s name came up immediately, in 39.8% within 24 hours, and in 57.0%

within a week. This might be cause for alarm, but there is other evidence that the police are on the trail of the killer relatively early in the investigation as well.

Police focused on the killer as a suspect or person of interest almost immediately at the beginning of the investigation in 17.7% of the cases, and within one and one-half days in an additional 39.9%. But, unfortunately, there was a dramatic drop-off — after a month from the beginning of the murder investigation, there was still no primary suspect in more than 34.7% of the murders. Fortunately, it also means that by a month's end, investigators had focused on the killer in a large majority of cases.

### *Physical Evidence*

Physical evidence linked to the killer was collected in 67.2% of the cases. While there is a correlation between the gathering of physical evidence and solvability, physical evidence by itself does not ensure solution. The most common evidence collected that is related to the killer was hair (Table 35). Strands of the killer's hair were collected in 26.1% of the cases of child abduction murder. When we look at hair evidence in all murder cases, it is present in only 18.0% of the cases, and that includes killer, victim, animal, and "unknown" hair evidence.

The most common evidence collected in all murder investigations is a weapon (39.0%). In child abduction murders, weapons were collected in only 20.0% of the cases. This is consistent with cause of death data that show children are killed less often with a weapon and more often by human physical agency.

**Table 35**

*Physical Evidence Related to Killer*

Evidence	%
Hair	26.1
Weapons	20.0
Prints (Finger and Shoe)	18.0
Semen	17.2
Fibers	15.9
Blood	14.3

*Discarded Evidence*

The police found physical evidence deliberately discarded by the killers in 24.2% of the cases. Of that discarded evidence, 36.0% of it was found along the roads on which the killer traveled in the course of the murder, body disposal, or escape. It is important to note that 56.5% of the evidence found along a road was within one mile of the body recovery site. Increased clearance rates are observed when discarded evidence is found by the police in general murders. This has important investigative implications for child abduction murder investigations.

In a child abduction murder, there is a good chance that there is discarded physical evidence along the road within one mile of the body disposal site, and that improves the odds of case solution. Is it worth the effort to do that kind of search? The answer depends on the circumstances surrounding the case. The detectives at the scene have to make that decision. However, there is now strong evidence that it might pay off in catching the killer to have a set of objective criteria to apply during consideration of investigative options.

### *Polygraph*

The use of the polygraph in investigations of murder of abducted or missing children is fairly common (47.1%). While it is a common practice, its utility is in question. As shown in Table 36, the polygraph was used to test acquaintances (26.3%) and family members (22.7%) of the victim. However, in 33.8% of the cases in which the polygraph was used, a person *other than* the accused showed “deception” on the test. Interestingly, of those persons who showed deception, 13.3% were family or friends of the victim, the two groups most often polygraphed.

**Table 36**

#### *Relationship of Persons Polygraphed to Victim*

Relationship	%
Acquaintances	26.3
Family Members	22.7
Strangers	19.2
Neighbors	7.2

When two additional facts are considered, the use of the polygraph becomes more clouded: 1) the younger the victim, the less likely police believe the polygraph helps the investigation; but 2) the younger the victim, the more likely the family or friends of the victim will be polygraphed. So it seems that those who are more likely to be polygraphed are more apt to show a “false deception.” And the less likely the polygraph may help the case, the more likely it is to be used.

Overall, the use of the polygraph was perceived by detectives to have helped the investigation in 62.1% of the cases, while in 9.0% of the cases detectives believed that it was

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

### *News Media*

Anyone familiar with criminal investigations understands that media involvement sometimes disrupts orderly investigation. At times there tends to be a distrust of the news media by law enforcement officers. There are many concerns about the media; for example, fear of inappropriate information being released, telling the suspect what the police know or do not know, or that media representatives will interfere with the progress of the investigation. Of the detectives interviewed, 46.8% believed that the media coverage of the investigation was “excessive.”

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

In spite of the law enforcement concerns, and in spite of the high-profile nature of these types of murder, the police used the news media in one way or another in 74.9% of these abducted child murder cases. The most common use of the media was in an attempt to locate witnesses. Even while using and cooperating with the news media, there is a fear in law enforcement that news media involvement may hinder the investigation in one way or another.

To justify their suspicions, homicide detectives point to examples of media interference hurting an investigation. In actuality, in child abduction murder investigations, the media effect on the criminal investigation is more positive than negative. As shown in Table 37, in 56.8% of these cases, the media involvement had no effect at all.

**Table 37**

*Effect of Media Coverage on the Investigation*

Effect	%
No Effect	56.8
Helped	32.9
Hindered	6.2
Unknown	4.1

However, in 32.9% of the cases, the investigating detective believed that the use of the media helped the investigation, usually by bringing a witness forward. The detective felt that the media hindered or hurt the investigation in only 6.2% of the cases. An argument can be made that any hindrance is too often, but we will learn shortly that there are other institutions that have a more negative impact on the investigations.

*Outside Forces That Created Problems for the Investigation*

As demonstrated in Table 38, the three most frequently identified outside forces that created any kind of problem during investigations were another outside law enforcement agency, news media, and the family of the victim.

**Table 38**

*Problems Caused by Outside Forces*

Outside Forces	%
Police Agencies	9.9
News Media	9.1
Family of Victim	5.0
Community/Political Pressure	2.8
Lawyers	1.3

*Red Herrings*

A “red herring” is something that diverts attention from the matter at hand. An example of a red herring in a murder investigation might be a vehicle that detectives believe to be the killer’s vehicle, with a major commitment of manpower devoted to finding it — at the expense of other avenues of inquiry — only to learn later that the car was not involved.

Red herrings were reported in 38.0% of the investigations. They ranged from “good” suspects, to physical evidence, to erroneous polygraph results. While troublesome and time consuming for the investigation, the presence of a red herring had no statistical effect on the clearance rate of the cases.

## CHAPTER VIII

### MURDER INCIDENT SITES

#### Introduction

Keppel and Weis (1993) conceptualize the crime of murder as an incident. Each murder incident includes multiple sites or locations of contact between the killer and the victim, as well as potential witnesses. The investigation of a murder should emphasize the search for information about the major sites of a murder incident. The presence of information that establishes the existence of each site, coupled with when and where each site is located within the incident, and the manner in which their relationships affect each other, greatly influences the solution of murder investigations.

According to Keppel and Weis (1993), the follow-up investigation of a murder involves the gathering of information about the various components that are locations of victim-killer contact. The types of information crucial to the investigation, in order of their usual occurrence within the murder incident are:

1. Where and when the victim was last seen.
2. Where and when the killer initially contacted the victim.
3. Where and when the murder took place.
4. Where and when the body was recovered.

#### *Components of the Murder Incident*

Each of these components occurs in a murder, and therefore each is important to a murder investigation. The components are defined as:

1. The Victim Last Seen Site (VLS): the location where and time when the victim was last seen. The VLS was determined from eyewitness information and records indicating when and where the victim was last seen alive.
2. The Initial Contact Site (IC): the place where and time when the killer initially contacted the victim. The IC was established from evidence indicating that the killer first met the victim at a certain time and at a specific location during the course of the murder incident.
3. The Murder Site (MS): the place where and time when the victim sustained the death-producing injuries.
4. The Body Recovery Site (BR): the location where and time when police, medics, or witnesses found the victim, dead or alive, prior to transportation to a medical facility or morgue (Keppel, 1992; Keppel & Weis, 1993).

Information about the location and the time of each site within the sequence of the murder incident has an impact on case solvability. In most murder cases, the events occur simultaneously, and the research suggests that all events are located in the same place and not separated by distance or spans of time (Hanfland, et al., 1997; Keppel & Weis, 1993).

### *Separation of Components by Time and Distance*

The sites within incidents of murder may become separated in time and distance in two ways. First, the killer may consciously attempt to separate time and distance. The killer may believe that the separation of murder components will delay the discovery of various sites, perhaps for a long time, contributing to the destruction of evidence. The separation may also inhibit the investigation by creating communication and cooperation problems among police

agencies, because the locations are not within the authority of one jurisdiction. Second, the killer may simply unintentionally separate the location of components over time and distance.

### *Investigative Implications*

The information which identifies the location and time of each site is vitally important to investigations. The confirmation through evidence of the date, time, and location of a site prior to the identification of a possible suspect enables the investigator to more accurately check the whereabouts and verify alibis of a suspect against the time and location of that site (Hanfland, et al., 1997).

Keppel and Weis (1993) found that when any information on the dates and locations of the four murder incident sites was known, the probability of case solution increased. The study also showed a strong positive correlation between knowing the dates of occurrences for the murder incident locations and the ability to identify a perpetrator. Another important finding was that case solvability increased as the time separating pairs of murder incident sites decreased. The study supported their hypothesis that the more investigators know about the distances between the pairs of the murder incident sites, the more likely a case will be solved. The research also showed that when the distance between the locations was less than 200 feet, the solvability increased substantially. Finally, the research showed that when the times and distances decreased among pairs of murder incident sites, the solvability increased (Keppel, 1992).

The conclusions regarding time and distance in the Keppel and Weis (1993) research supported what experienced murder investigators have learned through their observations of murder cases. The more information detectives have about a case, especially about the murder incident sites, the more likely it will be solved. Their study showed that it was not “just any

information” that will enhance solvability — some information is more valuable and useful than other information in murder investigations.

### **Separation of Components in Child Abduction Murders**

Because information known about each murder incident component is critical to murder investigations of abducted children, the murder incident components were examined by time and distance separation. The variables used for this analysis captured the date of occurrence (exact or approximate), the type of location, and/or the address of that location. The following sections outline what information about the murder incident component was known on time, location, or both in the investigations of child abduction murders contained in this data set.

#### ***When Time is Known***

Because information known about each site is critical to the basic model for child abduction murder investigations, the murder incident components were examined by whether or not the time of the component was known. The murder incident component about which “time” was most often known was the Victim Last Seen Site (98.9%), followed by the Body Recovery Site (98.6%), Initial Contact site (87.5%), and the Murder Site (84.5%). This knowledge is detailed in Table 39.

**Table 39***Murder Incident Component Time Known*

Murder Incident Component	%
Victim Last Seen	98.9
Initial Contact	87.5
Murder	84.5
Body Recovery	98.6

*When Place is Known*

The murder incident component about which “location” was most often known was the Body Recovery Site (98.4%). This knowledge was followed in order by the Initial Contact Site (78.2%), Victim Last Seen site (78.1%), and the Murder Site (69.4%). Table 40 illustrates these findings.

**Table 40***Murder Incident Component Place Known*

Murder Incident Component	%
Victim Last Seen	78.1
Initial Contact	78.2
Murder	69.4
Body Recovery	98.4

### ***When Time or Place is Known***

The murder incident component about which “time *or* location” was most often known was the Victim Last Seen Site (99.3%). This was followed by the Body Recovery Site (99.0%), Initial Contact Site (93.5%), and the Murder Site (91.3%). Table 41 indicates the results of this analysis.

**Table 41**

#### ***Murder Incident Component Time or Place Known***

Murder Incident Component	%
Victim Last Seen	99.3
Initial Contact	93.5
Murder	91.3
Body Recovery	99.0

This order is unique to child abduction murder investigations. In general murder, Keppel (1992) found that the location of the Body Recovery Site was the location most often known, followed by the Murder Site, Victim Last Seen Site, and the Initial Contact Site. The data indicates that in child abduction murder investigations the order switched to the Victim Last Seen Site as the location about which information was most likely known. This is due to the nature of the victim. Children are missed more quickly than adult victims in some cases, especially small children who are usually in the presence of a caregiver. It is also not surprising that in these types of investigations that the percentage of knowledge about murder incident locations is higher than in general murders because of the high-profile nature of child abduction murder investigations.

### ***When Both Time and Place are Known***

An examination of the murder incident components about which both time and place were known produced a decrease in the known percentages. The murder site about which both time and

location was most often “known” was the Murder Site (98.0%), followed by the Victim Last Seen Site (77.7%), Body Recovery Site (77.2%), and the Initial Contact Site (62.6%) as indicated in Table 42.

**Table 42**

*Murder Incident Component Time and Place Known*

Murder Incident Component	%
Victim Last Seen	77.7
Initial Contact	62.6
Murder	98.0
Body Recovery	72.2

The Initial Contact Site was the murder incident component least identified by time and place in child abduction murders. This is not surprising, given that much of this information is gathered from witness statements or statements by the killer.

*Time Interval Between Incidents*

In addition to “knowing” about the time and place of the murder incident components, the actual time span between murder incident components was examined. The time spans between the Victim Last Seen Site to Initial Contact Site, Victim Last Seen Site to Murder Site, and Initial Contact Site to Murder Site, were then coded into one of the following time interval categories:

1. 0 minutes to 29 minutes 59 seconds
2. 30 minutes to 59 minutes 59 seconds
3. 1 hour to 4 hours 59 minutes 59 seconds
4. 5 hours to 24 hours
5. > 24 hours

The Victim Last Seen Site to Body Recovery Site, Initial Contact Site to Body Recovery Site, and Murder Site to Body Recovery Site were coded into one of the following categories:

1. 0 minutes to 7 hours 59 minutes
2. 8 hours to 15 hours 59 minutes
3. 16 hours to 23 hours 59 minutes
4. 24 hours to 47 hours 59 minutes
5. 48 hours to 71 hours 59 minutes
6. 72 hours to 167 hours
7. 7 days to 14 days
8. 15 days to 30 days
9. > 30 days.

The categories were based on the natural breaks in the frequency distribution of the CAM data.

It is interesting to note that the time span between when a victim was last seen and the initial contact with the killer was less than 30 minutes in over three-fourths of the child abduction murder investigations. The time span is illustrated in Table 43.

**Table 43**

*Time Span Between Victim Last Seen and Initial Contact*

Time span Interval	%
0 minutes to 29 minutes 59 seconds	76.3
30 minutes to 59 minutes 59 seconds	7.9
1 hour to 4 hours 59 minutes 59 seconds	10.8
5 hours to 24 hours	4.1
> 24 hours	.9

The data also indicated a very short time frame between when the initial contact between the victim and the killer occurred and when the victim was murdered. The abducted child was murdered in under 5 hours in 85.1% of cases as illustrated in Table 44. The victim was murdered in less than 30 minutes after he or she was last seen in 30.8% of cases.

**Table 44**

*Time Span Between Victim Last Seen and Murder*

Time span Interval	%
0 minutes to 29 minutes 59 seconds	30.8
30 minutes to 59 minutes 59 seconds	16.5
1 hour to 4 hours 59 minutes 59 seconds	35.6
5 hours to 24 hours	13.5
> 24 hours	3.6

The bodies of abducted children were recovered within 24 hours of when the victim was last seen in 37.6% of cases, within 48 hours in 49.4% of cases, and within a week in 68.5% of cases (Table 45).

**Table 45**

*Time Span Between Victim Last Seen and Body Recovery*

Time Span	%
0 hours to 7 hours 59 minutes	17.9
8 hours to 15 hours 59 minutes	11.0
16 hours to 23 hours 59 minutes	8.7
24 hours to 47 hours 59 minutes	11.8
48 hours to 71 hours 59 minutes	6.4
72 hours to 167 hours	12.7
7 days to 14 days	8.7
15 days to 30 days	6.1
> 30 days	16.7

**Table 46**

*Time Span Between Initial Contact and Murder*

Time span Interval	%
0 minutes to 29 minutes 59 seconds	38.1
30 minutes to 59 minutes 59 seconds	15.2
1 hour to 4 hours 59 minutes 59 seconds	31.8
5 hours to 24 hours	11.5
> 24 hours	3.4

The bodies of abducted children were recovered within 24 hours of when the killer and victim had their initial contact in 39.0% of cases, within 48 hours in 52.6% of cases, and within a week in 73.0% of cases. The time frame between when the initial contact and when the victim's body was recovered is illustrated in Table 47.

**Table 47**

*Time Span Between Initial Contact and Body Recovery*

Time Span	%
0 hours to 7 hours 59 minutes	20.1
8 hours to 15 hours 59 minutes	10.0
16 hours to 23 hours 59 minutes	8.9
24 hours to 47 hours 59 minutes	13.6
48 hours to 71 hours 59 minutes	6.1
72 hours to 167 hours	14.3
7 days to 14 days	7.2
15 days to 30 days	5.4
> 30 days	14.5

The bodies of abducted children were recovered within 24 hours of when the murder occurred in 46.4% of cases, within 48 hours in 57.6% of cases, and within a week in 76.3% of cases. The time frame between when the murder occurred and when the victim's body was recovered is illustrated in Table 48.

**Table 48***Time Span Between Murder and Body Recovery*

Time span Interval	%
0 hours to 7 hours 59 minutes	26.1
8 hours to 15 hours 59 minutes	11.4
16 hours to 23 hours 59 minutes	8.9
24 hours to 47 hours 59 minutes	11.2
48 hours to 71 hours 59 minutes	5.8
72 hours to 167 hours	12.9
7 days to 14 days	6.1
15 days to 30 days	4.3
> 30 days	13.2

*Distance Between Sites*

The distance between murder incident components was also examined. In the first-stage analysis, the distance between each pair of murder components was measured in feet or miles for each pair of components. Then the actual distance was placed into one of the following categories before inclusion in the CAM data set:

1. 0 feet to 199 feet
2. 200 feet to < ¼ mile
3. ¼ mile to < 1½ mile
4. 1½ mile to < 12 miles
5. > 12 miles

