

Living in Limbo

The experiences of, and impacts on, the families of missing people

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Aims of the research

- To review the existing research and literature
- To explore and identify the experiences and impacts faced by families left behind by missing people
- To explore how different missing scenarios produce different impacts for families
- To highlight immediate gaps in service provision
- To identify areas for policy development

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Research methods

- Interviews were conducted with 22 adults from 20 families of currently missing adults
- 17 women and 5 men were interviewed; 5 mothers, 2 fathers, 9 siblings (or siblings-in-law) and 6 sons or daughters of missing people.
- The missing family members were: 9 women and 11 men; 2 teenagers, 8 aged 20-39, 7 aged 40-60 and 3 aged 60 or more.
- 3 of the missing people had been gone for less than 1 year, 7 had been missing for 1-3 years, 6 had been missing for 4-10 years, and 4 had been missing for 10+ years.

<http://www.missingpeople.org.uk/uploads/files/Technical%20Appendix.pdf>

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Emotional and social impacts

All experiences and impacts are interconnected

- Personal experiences
 - Sadness
 - Emotional rollercoaster
 - Physical pain
 - Guilt
 - Anger
 - No news is good news

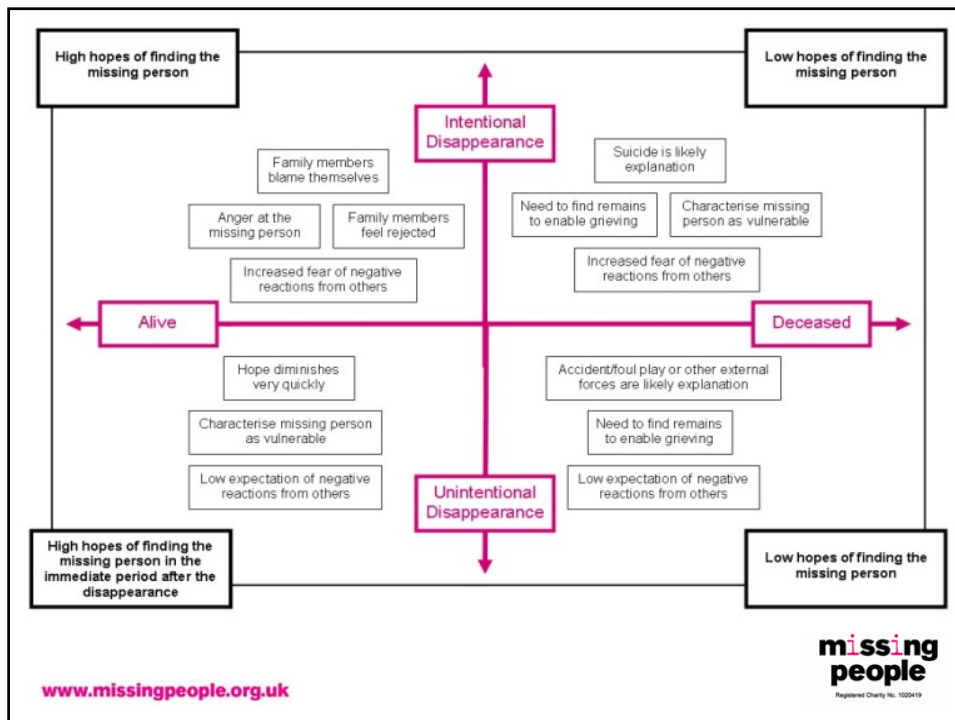
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Emotional and social impacts

- Family and relationships
- Reactions of others
 - Concern
 - Negative comments
 - Guarded
- Perceptions of the disappearance
 - Intentional
 - Unintentional
 - Deceased

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Emotional and social impacts

- The passage of time
 - Never get over it
 - In limbo
- Coping strategies
 - Getting on with life
 - Psychics and mediums
 - Counselling
 - Medication
 - Religion
 - Friends and family

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Financial, legal and practical impacts

- The cost of the search
 - Posters and leaflets
 - Travel
 - Pursuing costly enquiries
 - Disruption to work life
- Losing the missing person's income
- Dealing with the missing person's affairs
 - Paying for expert advice
 - Keeping up payments
 - Paying off debts

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Experiences with services

- Doing something is better than nothing
- Deciding to contact services
 - Facing the reality of the situation
- Co-ordination of services

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Experiences with the police

- What drives satisfaction?
 - Being taken seriously
 - Not feeling negatively stereotyped
 - Individual officers' manner
 - Being kept up to date with enquiries (being kept informed is a recognised driver for victim satisfaction)

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Satisfaction with police service

- Why satisfaction matters
 - Eases guilt and improves wellbeing, short and long term
 - Encourages honesty and cooperation
 - Avoids unnecessary expenditure and/or risk

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Media contact

- Sense of duty to missing person
- Practical reassurance (better than doing nothing)
- Fear of stereotyping
- Image management
- Mixed experiences

- Needs to be appropriate
- Needs to be worthwhile
- Needs to be accurate

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Recommendations

- Missing People advice/guidance literature
- Identification of, and signposting to, appropriate support services
- Improvement of mainstream services
- Effective consultation with families
- Improved legal and financial support/advice
- Re-examine presumption of death legislation

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Recommendations

- Police forces should note importance of their service to families' experience
- Families should have one point of contact with police
- Improved communication with families about search methods
- Improved police signposting to other services

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Living in Limbo in the media

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/7784014.stm>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2008/dec/15/missing-people-change-law-families>

<http://www.gm.tv/index.cfm?articleid=32348>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/hampshire/7859110.stm>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/7859485.stm>

http://news.sky.com/skynews/Home/UK-News/Claudia-Lawrence-How-Media-Help-Is-Vital-In-Missing-Persons-Inquiry/Article/200903415252866?lpos=UK_News_First_Home_Article_Teaser_Region_1&lid=ARTICLE_15252866_Claudia_Lawrence%3A_How_Media_Help_Is_Vital_In_Missing_Persons_Inquiry

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