

Missing and crime

Key points

- There are significant links between missing and crime, although going missing is not a criminal offence.
- Crime can be a key factor in the reasons adults, children and young people go missing either in response to a crime threatened or committed against them, or as a result of crimes which influence a person to go missing from home or care. Crimes related to missing include:
 - *Physical or emotional abuse and neglect*: up to 12 per cent of children and young people run away because of ‘maltreatment’ including physical or sexual violence and emotional abuse or neglect (Rees and Lee, 2005:16).
 - *Child sexual exploitation*: 58 per cent of evidence submissions to the Office of the Children’s Commissioner (OCC) Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) in Gangs and Groups stated that children had gone missing from home or care as a result of CSE (Berelowitz et al, 2012:49).
 - *Abduction and kidnap*: UK police forces record 500 offences of child abduction each year and an additional 1,000 offences of kidnapping children and adults (Newiss, 2014:8).
 - *Human trafficking*: in 2013, the UK Human Trafficking Centre identified 2,744 potential victims of trafficking, just under a quarter of whom were children (NCA, 2014b). Sixty per cent of child victims of trafficking placed in local authority care subsequently go missing (CSJ, 2013:24); most are never found again and are highly likely to be returning to exploitation (CSJ, 2014:24 and ECPAT UK 2007:5).
- Some young people and adults become victims or perpetrators of crime as a consequence of being missing:
 - The Still Running 3 study showed that 11 per cent of children and young people had been hurt or harmed while away from home on the most recent occasion. The same research showed that 12 per cent had stolen in order to survive whilst away from home (2011:16).
 - Over one third of adults had felt themselves to be in danger at some point whilst they were missing (Biehal et al, 2003:28).
- Preventing people going missing and ensuring that children, young people and vulnerable adults are aware of, and can access, appropriate support to stay safe whilst away from home are essential elements of an effective crime strategy.

Background

Every year approximately 250,000 people are reported missing to the police and other agencies across the United Kingdom. Annually, an estimated 140,000 people under the age of 18 go missing (Home Office, 2010).

Going missing is not a criminal offence. Adults over the age of 18 are free to choose to go missing unless they have been detained under the Mental Health Act (1983), or are legally in the care of another person.¹ However, literature shows that there are significant links between missing and crime:

“Whilst it is not a crime to go missing, there may be factors relating to the criminal justice system, either underpinning the motives of the missing person, or relating to the outcome of the missing persons investigation. On the other hand, the explanation may be totally removed from any criminal dimension and could include social problems associated with mental health issues, alcohol issues, child psychological abuse, child neglect or parental rejection of a child. It could be a combination of both criminal activities and social problems. (James et al. 2008:2.)

Figure 1 below summarises the relationship between missing and crime. Firstly, crime can be a key factor in the reasons why children, young people and adults go missing. This can be either in response to a crime that has been committed or threatened against them. It may also result from a person being forced to abandon their home, or leave as a consequence of being groomed for exploitation. Equally, being in trouble with the police or involvement in criminal activity can trigger a decision to go missing.

Secondly, crime can feature in the lives of children and adults once missing. Whilst away from home, the likelihood of being a victim of crime, or committing a crime (often as part of a survival strategy) may increase. Risk of experiencing harm can be heightened by vulnerabilities including mental health problems, alcohol or drug use, and homelessness.

This paper looks at missing and crime using the structure outlined in figure 1; the influence of crime on the reasons behind why people go missing, and involvement in crime whilst missing, considering victimisation and participation in criminal activity within each.

However, the four dimensions are not mutually exclusive. For example, a person might run away from home to get away from a violent situation and then get involved in crime, or a become a victim of crime, whilst away. To illustrate some of these complexities, stories from people who have contacted the Missing People helpline (116 000) are used throughout the information sheet.

Figure 1: The relationship between missing and crime



¹ Children and young people who go missing from home or care should, in accordance with statutory guidance, be safeguarded through protocols agreed between local authorities, police forces and other partners, for finding and safeguarding them. (DfE. 2014a:10).

Crime as a reason for being missing

Missing as a result of being a victim of crime

Victimisation can be a key reason for going or becoming missing. A person might be 'forced' to go missing because they are a victim of crime, for example, they are abducted, kidnapped or forcibly removed from their home. Equally, a person might go missing intentionally in response to a crime committed or threatened against them, for example, to escape violence at home, or gang exploitation. Crimes which influence the reason a person goes missing take many forms including forced marriage, 'honour' based violence, modern slavery, human trafficking, child sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation and abduction, as well as other physical or emotional abuse and neglect. Each of these areas and their links to missing is discussed in more detail below.

Abduction and kidnap

Adults and children can be missing because they are the victims of abduction or kidnap. UK police forces record more than 500 offences of child abduction each year and an additional 1,000 offences of kidnapping children and adults (Newiss, 2014:8). A joint study of child abduction by Parents and Abducted Children Together (PACT) and Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), showed that 42 per cent of attempted abductions were perpetrated by a strangers, 19 per cent by parents or other family members and a further 35 per cent by someone known but not related to the child. Three quarters of the abductions attempted by strangers did not result in the child being taken (Newiss and Traynor, 2013:6).

Variations in the law and definition relating to abduction and kidnap across the UK mean that it is difficult to make an accurate assessment of the extent of these crimes. Additionally, Newiss and Traynor highlighted a number of other difficulties in assessing the extent of child abduction in the UK: not all child abductions are reported to the police; there is no single comprehensive source of data on child abduction available; and methods used to record crime are often limited to a single (most serious) offence for each incident (2013:9). The establishment of the Child Abduction Hub² aims to address some of these issues and move towards more reliable, accessible and national information on child abduction in the UK.

There is an overlap between child sexual exploitation and abduction, although each can also operate independently of the other. Newiss and Fairbrother's study of police recorded offences of child abduction in England and Wales found that ten per cent of cases involved grooming or an exploitative relationship (2004:4). CEOP's thematic assessment of child sexual exploitation found that some perpetrators of grooming had previous convictions of child abduction (CEOP 2011:7).

Modern slavery

Modern slavery encompasses slavery, human trafficking, forced labour, criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation and domestic servitude. It has links with missing either because individuals run away to escape these crimes, or because they are missing as a result of being trafficked or enslaved. The Home

² www.childabduction.org.uk is the UK hub for the latest information and advice on all types of child abduction, bringing together the latest developments in prevention and response.

Office estimates that there were up to 13,000 potential victims of modern slavery in the UK in 2013 (Home Office, 2014b).

The Modern Slavery Bill, introduced to Parliament in June 2014, contains measures to enable law enforcement to tackle modern slavery more effectively. These include increasing the maximum sentence available for offenders to life imprisonment, the establishment of an anti-slavery Commissioner and strengthening powers to recover profits that traffickers and slave masters have made from their crimes. The Bill also increases and enhances protection and support for victims, including: the creation of a new statutory defence for victims of modern slavery who are forced to commit an offence as a direct consequence of their slavery; the introduction of statutory guidance on how to identify and support victims of modern slavery effectively; and establishment of a legal duty for public bodies to notify the National Crime Agency about potential victims of modern slavery.

In addition to the legislation, the Home Office has published a document outlining its activities on modern slavery, which includes trialling child trafficking advocates, establishing safeguarding and trafficking teams at UK borders, working with the private sector to address modern slavery in supply chains and reviewing the National Referral Mechanism³ (Home Office, 2014a). These activities have been incorporated into the Modern Slavery Strategy published by the Home Office in November 2014 which details actions expected of government departments, agencies and partners in the UK to address modern slavery (Home Office, 2014c).

Human trafficking

An individual may go missing because they have been taken or kidnapped for the purposes of human trafficking. Victims may also go missing to avoid being trafficked, or escape from their traffickers. Fear of reprisals can cause victims of trafficking, particularly children, to go missing from a place of care or safety and return to the perpetrators. Victims may also go missing again because the trafficker has control and contact over them, even when they are in care, and removes them under pre-arranged orders (ECPAT UK. 2007).

The United Kingdom is a source, transit and destination country for victims of human trafficking (Home Office, 2014a). The UK Human Trafficking Centre estimated that there were 2,744 potential victims of human trafficking in 2013⁴ (NCA, 2014b), which represents an increase of 22% compared to the 2,255 potential victims reported in 2012 (UKHTC, 2013). However, these figures are likely to underestimate the scale of the issue due to the covert nature of modern slavery.

Of the 1,746 potential victims who were referred to the NRM in 2013, 74 per cent were adults and 26 per cent children (Home Office, 2014a:2). The most common types of exploitation of adults recorded by the NRM were sexual (45 per cent) and labour (39 per cent) exploitation. The type of exploitation for child victims was unknown in 31 per cent of referrals but, like adults, sexual and labour exploitation were most common (27 per cent and 32 per cent of child victims respectively) (NCA, 2014a:2). The majority of all victims of sexual exploitation were women (93 per cent), whilst men were more commonly exploited for labour (80 per cent of all victims of labour exploitation) (NCA, 2014b:10-15).

³ The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is the trafficking victim identification and support process in the UK.

⁴ This estimate is based on intelligence from the National Crime Agency, NRM data and information from responses to an intelligence requirement.

Criminal exploitation most often included benefit or financial exploitation, where victims are forced to claim UK benefits to which they are entitled but where the money is withheld by the traffickers, or made to take out credit agreements for goods which are then sold on by the traffickers. Cannabis cultivation and theft were the next most common criminal activities victims were forced to undertake.

Where child victims of trafficking are identified and placed in local authority care, 60 per cent subsequently go missing, nearly a third of whom disappear within a week of being placed in care (CSJ, 2013:24, CSJ 2013:194 ECPAT UK, 2007:20), and most are never found again and are highly likely to be returning to exploitation (CSJ, 2013:24 and ECPAT UK 2007:5). There is broad agreement from children's services, the police and the voluntary sector that a lack of appropriate accommodation for trafficked children 'contributes significantly' to the high numbers of trafficked children who go missing (CSJ,2013:24). The joint inquiry by the APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers held in 2012 recommended that specialist foster care is needed to "help trafficked children to break the contact with their traffickers and prevent them from going back" (2012:17).

In July 2014, the Government published statutory guidance on the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking and trafficked children. The guidance states that the care planning process should explicitly take account of the complex needs of trafficked children (DfE, 2014b) but stops short of introducing a full system of guardianship⁵. The Government is trialling a system of child trafficking advocates, where a professional with specialist knowledge and experience of the issues affecting trafficked children (as well as the immigration and criminal justice systems) will input into the care planning process and provide independent advocacy support guidance and advice to trafficked children. Outcomes of the trial are expected in 2015, and could impact on the rate of missing amongst these children.

The Centre for Social Justice also emphasises the importance of providing adequate support to adults who are potential victims of trafficking during initial police investigations to prevent them going missing (2013:147). In addition, the report stresses the importance of providing consistent aftercare services for survivors of trafficking, and ensuring that there are links to a sustainable 'umbrella of support' on leaving these services, to reduce the risks of survivors becoming isolated or going missing again (CSJ. 2013: 177).

Valentine's story

Valentine is a 14 year old victim of trafficking who had been missing for 249 days when she contacted Missing People.

By the time that 14 year old Valentine made contact with Missing People she had been living rough for months. Before she would talk about her circumstances she first wanted to make sure Missing People were a confidential service and could not trace her telephone call. Missing People provided reassurance that they would work with her, in confidence, to help her understand her options and ensure she was safe.

Continued overleaf

⁵ A system of guardianship would be where a nominated adult is responsible for each child victim of trafficking and would: have parental responsibility, provide care and support, and help prevent the child from further trafficking or harm.

Valentine's story (continued)

For Valentine sleeping rough felt like a better and safer option than being at home. She explained that the lady she called "mum" is not her mum. This woman had 'stolen' her from her family in Africa when she was aged five and brought her to England. She believes she came here on a false passport. This woman had abused her. Her "brother" who is 28 had sexually assaulted her. She ran away a lot because she was not safe staying in her home environment.

She had not felt able to tell the truth before now because the lady she calls "mum" had threatened to kill her if she told anyone else what had happened. As a result, when she had been picked up by the police on previous occasions she was not able to tell them the truth and so was returned to her home address, where she suffered more abuse. She was in a vicious circle.

While she was sleeping rough she was regularly sexually assaulted. By now she was tired, emotionally and physically abused and just wanted to be safe.

It took time, over a number of phone calls, for Missing People to build up trust. When Valentine felt confident with Missing People, with her agreement, they included her on a three way call with social services to find out what help they could give Valentine who was terrified that she would be taken back to the lady she called "mum." Social services helped her into foster care and back into education; she is also accessing local youth advice and support.

Forced marriage and 'honour' based violence

Research has identified that individuals may go missing to escape forced marriage and 'honour' based violence (HBV).⁶ In their case file study, Biehal et al (2003) found that a group of young women aged between 18 and 30 had gone missing following conflict with their families over their choice of partner. Britton et al (2002) also identified the issue of forced marriage and HBV as factors influencing young Asian women going missing. Brandon and Hafez argue that going missing may be the only way to avoid forced marriage for many young people but brings risks, including further honour based violence, if they are found by their families (2008:44). Perpetrators of violence and families may report their victim missing or falsely accuse the missing person of a crime, in order to locate them (NPIA, 2008; FMU, 2009).

'Honour' based violence can also result in the abduction, trafficking or removal of women and girls from their homes for the purpose of forced marriage. One study suggests that, each year, 1,000 women and girls are abducted from the UK by their families and taken to a foreign country with the intention of being forced into marriage (Hossain, 2001).

Being missing from education is generally considered to be a useful indicator of a child being at risk of forced marriage because of the 'lack of an adequate mechanism to identify missing children in this situation' (Kazimirski et al, 2008: 141). UK charity Refuge found a 'trigger' for forced marriage for many girls is the end of their compulsory education because children were no longer 'in a system which might

⁶ 'Honour' based violence covers a range of practices including 'controlling sexual activity, domestic abuse, child abuse, rape, kidnapping, false imprisonment, female genital mutilation, threats to kill and fear of or actual forced marriage, or homicide. (NPIA, 2008: 12).

ask questions about their whereabouts and wellbeing’ (Sharp, 2008:10). Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance on keeping children safe in education (DfE, 2014c) states that a child going missing from an education setting is a potential indicator of abuse, neglect or exploitation, and signposts the statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care for more information on how to prevent the risks of them going missing in the future (DfE, 2014a).

In June 2014, the Government introduced new legislation to criminalise forced marriage in England and Wales. The legislation also applies to UK nationals overseas who are at risk of becoming the victim of a forced marriage. Similar legislation was enacted in Scotland in September 2014.

Child sexual exploitation

‘Going missing is recognised as a risk factor for sexual exploitation within successive research and evaluation studies’ (Sharp, 2012:10) both as a cause, and consequence (discussed later in the [Becoming a victim of crime whilst missing](#) section), of going missing.

The Office of the Children’s Commissioner (OCC) Inquiry into child sexual exploitation (CSE) in gangs and groups clearly demonstrates the links with missing: 58 per cent of evidence submissions stated that children had gone missing from home or care as a result of CSE; 70 per cent of the sexually exploited children interviewed for the Inquiry had gone missing from home; and 14 site visits showed that children who were being sexually exploited were also repeatedly going missing (Berelowitz et al. 2012:49). Jago et al showed that over half of young people using child sexual exploitation services on one day were known to have gone missing and, of those, over half had gone missing more than ten times (2011:48). Similarly, Barnardo’s identifies going missing as one of the top four risk factors for CSE and estimates that up to 50 per cent of the children and young people they work with and had been sexually exploited, went missing on a regular basis (2011:20).

Experiencing CSE can cause a person to go missing. Children and young people may run away as a result of being abused in their family home, or to escape exploitation from other perpetrators (Smeaton, E, 2013:18). Children may also be groomed by offenders luring them away from home for sexual exploitation. There is a growing consensus that children and young people who are sexually exploited are likely to first go missing for short periods of time but on a regular basis (Sharp, 2012:9). Perpetrators cultivate a sense of trust before coercing victims into sexual activity, which may lead them to be away from home for longer periods of time. They can also deliberately encourage behaviour to cause conflict between young people and their parents or carers (even where it did not previously exist), further encouraging them to be away from home for longer periods of time (Sharp, 2012:13).

Finally, children might run away as a consequence of how their disclosure of CSE is responded to: they may feel that they are not believed or that others ‘pretend’ it has not happened. Furthermore, the pressure of being involved in a police investigation into CSE, and fear of reprisals from perpetrators, can also cause a young person to go missing (Smeaton, 2013:18-19).

Gang crime and exploitation

There is some evidence to link involvement with gangs and episodes of missing from home or care. In 2014, Missing People inspected cases of missing young people aged between 12 and 24, opened by the

charity between July 2013 and August 2014, for evidence of likely gang involvement.⁷

The findings showed that of the 594 young people whose case histories were examined, nine (two per cent) were 'very likely' to have been involved in gangs, in other words, where the record contained some direct mention of gangs, either by the police or a family member. Possible signs of gang involvement were identified for a further 38 young people (six per cent), where there were particular activities or associations in their case notes which might point to a connection with a gang.

Other findings linking missing and gang involvement include the interim report of the OCC inquiry into child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups which presented evidence of children being abducted and held with limited access to food, water and washing facilities (Berelowitz, S. 2012:38). Newiss and Traynor also discussed the risk to male gang members of serious violence, including abduction, arising from disputes, retaliation and territorial matters (2013:27).

Escaping violence, abuse and neglect

Some people intentionally leave home, run away or go missing to escape a negative situation. Still Running 2 reported that approximately 12 per cent of young people had run away because of 'maltreatment' including physical or sexual violence and emotional abuse or neglect (Rees and Lee, 2005:16). Similarly, the Lost from View study found that around five per cent of children and young people cited physical abuse as a reason for running away and a similar proportion said that past sexual abuse had influenced their decisions (Biehal et al. 2003:22). Some research estimates emotional abuse or neglect as the cause of running away for around one in four young people (Safe on the Streets Research Team, 1999:49).

Andrew's story

Andrew is a 12 year old boy who is being physically abused at home. He is frightened and wants to run away. He called Missing People to talk through his situation and find out how to get help.

Andrew called Missing People one evening in a distressed state. Home life was becoming increasingly difficult for Andrew who was subjected to physical violence and verbal abuse from his brother and father. Andrew told Missing People "I can't take it any more" because he was constantly frightened that he was going to get "punished" by his father. As he spoke, he was at home, locked in the bathroom, hiding from his family.

Andrew had disclosed his situation to his school and had been assigned a key worker. However, he said the school had spoken to his father and things had got worse as a result. He had also run away from home the previous week and was returned by the police when, again, his situation worsened.

Andrew said he wanted to leave again that night because he felt so frightened. Missing People talked to Andrew, gaining his trust, getting an understanding of the situation and exploring his options.

Continued overleaf

⁷ Identification of gang involvement is likely to be an under-estimate of the overall total because information from the police risk assessment of this will not always be passed to the charity. Similarly, it is possible that informants (e.g. police officers or family members) may not be aware that the young person is involved with a gang.

Andrew's story continued

Andrew expressed a wish to be taken into care and Missing People explained that for this to happen social services would need to assess him as being unsafe to live at home and talked through the processes that would be followed.

With Andrew's permission Missing People set up a three way call with the police. The police call taker explained to Andrew that they had a duty of care to him and would need to send police officers to his home address to check he was safe and well. Andrew explained that would make his dad more angry and put him at greater risk. He asked if the officers could come to his school the next day instead. The call taker agreed to this and told Andrew to call 999 if he felt unsafe or at any risk of being hit that night. Missing People stayed on the line with Andrew after the police had left the call. Andrew said he felt nervous but would call 999 if he felt in danger. Missing People also reassured him that he could call back any time if he needed further support.

The Lost from View study of missing people in the UK showed that two per cent of adults were fleeing violence and, that in these circumstances, "a missing person fearing for their safety may feel obliged to break contact with their entire family network" (Biehal et al, 2003:17). The ACPO guidance on investigating domestic abuse acknowledges the link that can exist between reasons for a person being missing and domestic violence. In particular, a person reporting a missing person may not know, or may not disclose, domestic abuse to the police. On the other hand, by reporting a person missing an abuser might be attempting to locate a victim who has escaped a violent situation. The missing person could also be a victim of a domestic homicide. The guidance provides guidelines for officers investigating the disappearance of a missing person who is or might be a victim of domestic abuse (NPIA. 2008:15-16).

Craig's story

Craig is a 21 year old man who has left home because of physical violence. He called Missing People because he felt he could not return home and had nowhere safe to stay.

Craig called Missing People because he was away from home and wanted to find somewhere safe to stay. He said he had left home because his father was physically abusive and he had received death threats from another family member living in the same house. He had been allocated emergency accommodation for one night by an agency on behalf of the local authority but had since been 'sleeping rough.'

Missing People contacted the Emergency Housing team at the local authority on behalf of Craig. They explained they were aware of his case but had no duty of care because he was an adult. They said Craig would be entitled to housing benefit because he was in receipt of job seekers allowance and that he would need to look for a room to rent, or a hostel to accommodate him. They provided details of a local room search website and informed him that he could apply to his local credit union for help with a deposit. Missing People passed on this information to Craig and also advised that he could use a local library to access the internet to assist the search. Craig followed the advice and called back to inform Missing People that he had found a room to accommodate him for a week whilst he sorted out his housing benefit.

Missing because of involvement in criminal activity

Children and young people

Research shows that there are links between the reasons children and young people run away and involvement in crime and criminal activity. Still Running 2 showed that young people who had been in trouble with the police, and those who saw themselves as having problems with drugs and alcohol, were four times as likely to have run away than those who had not (Rees and Lee, 2005:14). The Lost from View study also identified how a cycle of running away can be linked to behaviours such as offending, drug use and missing school, which become 'mutually reinforcing'. The same research showed links between youth offending behaviour and running away, a few of whom were attempting to avoid arrest but, "more commonly, their decision to run away was linked to the fall-out from their behaviour at home" (Biehal et al, 2003:23). Sam's story illustrates some of this complexity.

Sam's story

The reasons that young people run away from home can be complex and multi-dimensional. Sam's story illustrates how victimisation, involvement in crime, drug and alcohol use can work together to lead a young person to decide to run away.

Sam's behaviour had been going downhill for almost one and a half years: she had stolen, committed a serious assault and threatened her sister with a knife. She was also using drugs and alcohol on a regular basis. Sam, now 16, had experienced a number of difficulties in her life. When she was three, her father had died in a road traffic accident. She had been bullied at school, witnessed violence at home and been in care. She reported being a victim of rape when aged 13 and had attempted suicide.

Sam had been missing for three weeks when Missing People were approached by the police. A large part of the charity's role was to offer support to Sam's mother who was distraught. She couldn't sleep, couldn't eat and had been prescribed anti-depressants. She also felt very alone. Missing People launched a search campaign via posters, social media and a London newspaper. Through this, the charity received an anonymous call to their 116 000 freephone number suggesting where Sam might be found. One day later Sam called her mother and asked to be picked up by the police. Her mother was delighted.

Missing People are continuing to give Sam's mother support as this is the start of a new and potentially challenging phase for her and her daughter.

Adults

Less information is available on adult involvement in crime as a reason for going missing. Lost from View showed that crime was a reason for disappearance for four per cent of adults, mostly to avoid arrest or prosecution, but for some also because 'they felt ashamed to face their families', or others factors such as depression or relationship difficulties impacted their decisions (Biehal et al, 2003:17). There are also occasions when a person may be considered by the police as both 'missing' and 'wanted', in other words, 'wanted for an offence, an absconder from a lawful care or custody order, or is Absent

Without Leave (AWOL)' (NPIA 2010:16). In such cases, the police decide whether to treat the investigation as 'wanted' or 'missing' based on an assessment of whether they are at risk of harm by their own actions or from a third party (NPIA 2010:16).

Experience of crime whilst missing

Becoming a victim of crime whilst missing

Adults, children and young people who are missing or have run away from home or care are at risk of being a victim of crime whilst away. Risk of victimisation is increased if they are sleeping rough, or staying with someone they did not know before leaving home, or have other risk factors such as mental health problems or alcohol issues. Being separated from their support networks and professional help can also increase the vulnerability of missing people (Missing People, 2014:7).

Victimisation of adults

The Lost from View study showed that over one third (36 per cent) of adults had felt themselves to be in danger at some point while they were missing - with those missing more often in the past being more likely to have felt in danger. Adults who had slept rough, or stayed in a hostel, were more likely to report having felt in danger at some point whilst missing (Biehal et al 2003 28-19). Another study of rough sleepers found that they are more than twice as likely to be victims of crime than the general population (Ballintyne, 1999). The risks and dangers encountered included being physically or sexually assaulted, mugged or physically attacked, feeling threatened by people around them, being approached by strangers, and their own mental health and suicide attempts (Biehal et al, 2003:28-29). Stevenson et al also showed that: 'Missing journeys were not risk-free and adults revealed encounters with significant others on their journeys that may shelter or conceal them or facilitate drug and sexual activities' (2013:12).

Victimisation of children and young people

The Still Running 3 study showed that 11 per cent of children and young people had been hurt or harmed while away from home on the only or most recent occasion (Rees, 2011:16). Furthermore, 18 per cent said that they had slept rough or stayed with someone they just met for at least some of the time they were away (Rees, 2011:16), potentially placing them in a risky situation where they are more likely to be a victim of crime.

Analysis in the Lost from View study showed that one in eight children and young people had been physically hurt whilst away from home and one in nine reported being sexually assaulted. Combining these figures with those who had slept rough or stayed with a stranger resulted in 54 per cent having been exposed to one of these risks whilst away from home (Biehal et al, 2003:32). Indeed, experience of sexual assault and the fear of this whilst sleeping rough can lead to some young people taking considerable risks to avoid having to sleep on the streets again.

Child sexual exploitation whilst missing

As discussed above, there is significant evidence that children and young people who go missing are at risk of child sexual exploitation (Sharp, 2012; Home Office 2011; Berelowitz 2013; Rees, 2011). A lack of safe places for young runaways, and a resistance by some to use statutory agencies for fear of being returned home, can result in young people spending time on the streets where exploitative adults have unlimited and unsupervised access to them. Equally, children and young people may make 'risky' decisions to stay with people they do not know in order to avoid sleeping rough, or get involved with exploitative adults through the need for somewhere to hang out and be accepted (Sharp, 2012:12). Perpetrators can exploit this vulnerability: 'young runaways are easy prey for someone who is offering so-called love, affection and attention' they are often running away from their family because they feel they cannot talk to them, therefore, it is easy for perpetrators to 'fulfil' this role (Smeaton, 2013:24). CSE can also be a 'survival strategy and something that children and young people have to do in order to get a roof over their head and a meal' (Smeaton, 2013:22). Chris' story illustrates some of these issues.

Chris' story

Chris is a 14 year old girl who has run away from her care home. She is particularly vulnerable because she is using drugs, has nowhere safe to stay and appears to be at risk of child sexual exploitation whilst away.

Missing People received a call from Chris, a 14 year old girl, who had run away from her care home at around four in the afternoon. She had travelled some distance to Bristol via train, bus and then completing the final leg of the journey by hitching a lift with someone she did not know. It was now 11pm and Chris was calling from the stairwell of a block of flats where she was staying for the time being. She had been using drugs and said she was 'high' but did not have a plan what to do for the rest of the night.

After spending some time discussing her situation with Missing People and talking through her options, she agreed to a three way call with her local social services team. The call-taker at social services said she was unable to help Chris because she could not provide a phone number and had no means of calling her back – Chris was using a stolen mobile phone and did not know the number. They suggested Chris went to a police station or telephone kiosk and call back from there. However, at this point Chris decided to end the three way call, saying she was going to 'take a pill' and then 'make money this evening' but would return to her care home in the morning.

Increased risks of victimisation from a lack of safe places to stay

Young people aged 16 or 17 can be at particular risk of harm when they go missing because they may fall between the gaps in children's and adult services (The Children's Society, 2007; Sharp, 2012), lack the means to live independently and are generally too young to sign tenancy contracts (Citizens Advice Bureau). If housed in temporary accommodation, they are subject to increased risks of being targeted for gang recruitment or being sexually exploited (DCLG and DCSF, 2008).

The lack of emergency accommodation makes it very difficult for children and young people to avoid becoming victims of crime. There is just one refuge in Britain that provides confidential emergency accommodation for children under the age of 16 who have run away and are at risk of harm: the Safeplace Refuge in Yorkshire run by Safe@Last. For young people aged 16-25 some other options are available such as DePaul Nightstop which provides a network of emergency accommodation in volunteer hosts' homes. In most areas of the country however, demand for emergency accommodation significantly outstrips supply. Some voluntary organisations, including Missing People, call for the government to improve safeguarding for young people by ensuring better access to suitable emergency accommodation for those who are unable to return home.

Homicide

In the study Learning from Fatal Disappearances, Newiss found that 14 out of 186 people (8 per cent)⁸ who had died whilst missing in one year were victims of homicide (2011:10). An earlier study also showed that there is a much higher risk of a woman reported missing resulting in homicide than a missing man (Newiss 2004:27).

Involvement in crime whilst missing

Research shows that some children and young people are involved in criminal activity whilst missing. Shalev's study looking at the involvement in crime of children who go missing repeatedly showed that, in up to 40 per cent of the children's cases studied, the children's career in crime had started whilst they were missing (2010:31).

Still Running 3 found that 12 per cent of young people had stolen in order to survive whilst away from home; nine per cent had begged and one in nine had done 'other things' in order to survive (2011:16). Shalev also found that shoplifting and theft are common arrests for young runaways and suggests they might be considered 'survival strategies' because they have no other means of supporting themselves whilst away from home (2010:34). The research in this area suggests that the vulnerability of a young person away from home can increase the risk of them being involved in criminal activity. For example, Rees and Lee found that young runaways were more likely to steal or beg if they slept rough, than if they stayed with a relative (2005:19). Shalev asserts that involvement of children and young people in aggressive crimes whilst away from home, such as assault, grievous bodily harm, criminal damage, may be indicative of their emotional state and the lifestyle they face whilst away from home (2010:34).

Children who go missing repeatedly are seven times more likely to commit crime than those who do not go missing (Shalev, 2010:31). The length of time children and young people are missing from home is also linked to the probability of their involvement crime: Still Running 2 found that those who were away for a week or longer were more than twice as likely to employ 'survival strategies', such as stealing or begging, than those who were away for one night (Rees and Lee, 2005:19).

There are no substantive pieces of research or data available on adult involvement in crime whilst missing and in general less is known about the experiences of adults when they are missing because 'the focus of research into missing persons – children, youths, men and women – has centred on

⁸ The sample was based on cases where the person had died whilst missing, their disappearance had been investigated by the police and reported to the charity Missing People.

the first two groups which constitute the majority of missing cases' (Stevenson et al. 2013:20). However, like children and young people, adults who are missing also need to find ways to support themselves and there is some evidence of 'survival' strategies involving criminal activity: 'I did just get on a train and not pay for it. I just jumped on and luckily no ticket inspector came on and checked me.' (extract from Daniel's case study in Stevenson et al. 2013:13). As discussed earlier, it is also known that some victims of trafficking are criminally exploited and forced to commit crimes such as cannabis cultivation, theft, or entering the UK using forged documents.

Preventing missing episodes and crime prevention

Given the wide-ranging links between crime and missing incidents, it follows that preventing people going missing - and ensuring that those who do can access appropriate support whilst away from home or on return from missing - are essential elements of crime prevention, reduction and management.

When people are found or return from being missing, the police have a duty to conduct a safe and well check which should check for any indications that the person has suffered harm, check where and with whom they have been, and give them the opportunity to disclose any offending by or against them (NPIA. 2010:54). Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care states that when a child is found or returns they should also be offered an independent return interview (DfE, 2014a:14). A return interview 'aims to establish what has caused the young person to run away, what experiences and individuals the young person encountered while away and what could help resolve the issues that the child identifies' (The Children's Society. 2013:1). Statutory guidance also recommends that aggregated data from return interviews should be shared and used to identify patterns of behaviour and 'hotspots' of activity and risk in local areas, to help prevent episodes of missing and associated crime, risk and harm.

In contrast, most adults do not get offered a return interview when they return from being missing, nor are they given the help they need to tackle their problems to reduce the likelihood of them going missing again. The Association of Chief Police Officers suggests that return interviews are 'relevant to all missing persons' regardless of age (NPIA, 2010:55). However, at present there is no statutory guidance to clarify the responsibilities of different agencies in responding to missing adults and helping to prevent them going missing again.

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