

Institution: University of Glasgow (UofG)		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 14 Human Geography		
Title of case study: Returning missing people: changing professional practice and policy		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2011–2013		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Hester Parr Dr Olivia Stevenson (now UCL)	Parr (PI) Stevenson (RA)	Parr 2009–present Stevenson 2011–2014.
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013–2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? Yes		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>In the UK one person goes missing every two minutes on average. In 2019, 99% of 342,053 UK people reported in ‘missing incidents’ returned. Parr led award-winning ESRC-funded research gathering narratives of returned missing adults and their families. Findings changed <i>Approved Professional Practice on Missing Persons</i> (England and Wales, 2016) and <i>Standard Operating Procedures</i> (Police Scotland, 2015), improving police protocols relating to return and family liaison, and reaching <i>all</i> UK officers in England, Wales (c.125,000) and Scotland (c.17,000). Parr co-developed training with the UK College of Policing ‘National Search Centre’ and evidence demonstrates improved empathetic police officer practice towards returning missing people and their families. Parr also used findings directly to shape government and voluntary sector changes, influencing UK charity and Scottish government policy priorities and guidance in this field, notably through the <i>National Framework for Missing People (Scotland)</i>.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>This case centres on improving a multi-sector professional response to returned missing adults and their families in the UK, using findings from the ESRC-funded <i>Geographies of Missing People</i> research project (2011–2013), and further mobilised by both University of Glasgow (UofG) ‘impact extension’ funding (Jan-July 2014) and funds from an ESRC <i>Outstanding Impact on Society</i> Award (2015). The original research (2011–2013) was organised via co-production processes and an academic-community team (Professor Nick Fyfe, University of Dundee; Dr Penny Woolnough, police researcher, Grampian Police) and led by Parr (PI, UofG) with Stevenson (RA). Parr led the conceptualisation, design and delivery of the project, including the academic and public report writing for public engagement. We appointed a police and charity Advisory Group that enabled the co-produced research design.</p> <p>Research findings: The key research-based conclusions of the ESRC project were that: (1) the social and spatial experiences of missing people and their families had previously been ignored in professional operational police practice and not used as learning resources; and (2) the complex needs of these groups were not being fully recognised or serviced by the police and charity sectors. These experiences and needs were recovered, analysed and represented in the project. The research highlighted how attending to the voiced experiences of returned missing people discloses their ‘lived geographies’: meaning how these people <i>use</i> spaces, places and environments when they go missing (not just the distances that they travel, as captured by the ‘distance-decay models’ commonly used in operational police practice: References 3.3, 3.1). While these insights enhance search techniques, the key finding is that the return of missing people is often poorly ‘handled’ by police officers, which represented a learning opportunity for improved good practice and new kinds of professional intervention that might prevent future incidence (3.1, 3.3, 3.4). Parr’s innovation was to gather voices of returned missing people into public ‘stories’ (3.4), and to use these stories to structure and inform the design of research reports containing a suite of closely related strategic recommendations. The experiences of families of missing people (3.5, 3.2) were also analysed to reveal new understandings of their own search strategies and common relationship dynamics that occurred upon the return of a missing person. A further key finding was that police and families often work in parallel, sometimes unhelpfully, rather than in partnership (3.5). The research also showed that police <i>and</i> charity services were not doing enough in their professional roles to respond to the social complexities of a missing</p>		

person's return. The importance of the *return* of missing people is hence *the* key finding from the research.

Since 2014 Parr has focussed on mobilising the project's research findings about the return of missing people, strategically presented in three public research reports (3.6) and in academic writing (3.1–3.5) to generate: (1) recommendations for updated guidance issued to police officers regarding their professional practice in missing persons cases, specifically to encourage empathetic and in-depth engagement with returned missing people, and with onward referral where necessary; (2) new training for police officers and other professionals directly involved with such cases; and (3) recommendations and education for a new UK-wide multi-sector approach to the return of missing people as an opportunity for intervention and prevention (3.6). The peer-reviewed research-led impact strategy and outcomes of this project gained Parr and her team an ESRC *Outstanding Impact in Society* Award in 2015, which enabled new funding for helping to deliver professional educational events that facilitated (3) above (3.6).

3. References to the research

- 3.1 Stevenson O, Parr H & Woolnough P 2017 Missing women: policing absence *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 42: 220–232 (<https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12160>)
- 3.2 Parr H, Stevenson O & Woolnough P 2016 Search/ing for missing people: families living with ambiguous absence *Emotion, Space and Society*, 19: 66–75 (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2015.09.004>)
- 3.3 Parr H, Stevenson O, Fyfe N & Woolnough P 2015 Living absence: the strange geographies of missing people *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 33: 191–208 (<https://doi.org/10.1068%2Fd14080p>)
- 3.4 Parr, H & Stevenson O 2014a Sophie's story: writing missing journeys *cultural geographies* 21: 565–582 (<https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474013510111>)
- 3.5 Parr H & Stevenson O 2014b 'No news today': talk of witnessing with families of missing people *cultural geographies* 22: 297–315 (<https://doi.org/10.1177-1474474014530962>)
- 3.6 Research reports and briefing papers: (<https://geographiesofmissingpeople.org.uk/>)

4. Details of the impact

The 2014 REF impact case study related to Parr's ESRC project was based on a series of face-to-face education events with police officers using research findings for professional training. The post-2014 research impact *extends* the purpose, depth and reach of the original training events and adds new sector-level policy and practice impacts at different scales with a focus on *return*. Since 2014, the research impact has been extended via: (1) institutionalised UK police training interventions (between 2014 and 2016) around better handling of families and the missing person's return, with evidence showing change in 'professional practice' for officers taking the direct training; (2) changes in police policy in 2014 and 2016 (written into guidance for standards and operations), for which sector leaders provide evidence of impact leading directly from the research into police policy change; (3) wider multi-sector initiatives (eg. *National Conversation* 'returned missing' events in England, Scotland and Wales), for which sector leaders provide evidence of research-led *change*, leading to: (i) new policy priorities and guidance in charity and government; (ii) Parr's direct influence in strategic and invited national roles because of her research-led expertise; and (iii) new Scottish government funded multi-sector training in Scotland (2018–2020) building directly on research findings; and (4) international reach in the Australian missing persons sector (police and charity).

(1) Police training and changing professional practice: Agreements with the College of Policing (CoP) and the internationally renowned Police National Search Centre (PNSC) led to the use of 'missing people's stories' and other research findings as linked and core elements of both on-line and in-person training modules. The CoP on-line modules have been taken by 138,722 officers between 2014 and 2020, linking officers to the research findings (**Source: 5.1**), while a direct taught module designed by Parr and Stevenson for search officers (POLSAs) who specialise in missing persons cases has been delivered to c.90 officers a year via the PNSC between 2014 and 2017. Evaluations by 300+ police officers taking the PNSC training modules show substantial *anticipated* and *actual* change in professional practice, as evidenced here:

Letter of evidence: *“The University training package is having an impact on how officers understand their role in search, how they plan and deliver search with reference to the mind-set of different missing people and how they engage with families of missing people. We also know that professional practice and the reputation of the police has been enhanced and changed as a result of engagement with this training package.”* (5.2, Module Lead, PSNC, 2017)

Self-reported evaluation example (anticipated change: 5.3):

2014 Police Sergeant: *“I will have a more empathetic approach.”*

Self-reported evaluation examples (actual change at 6 months: 5.3):

2015 Police Sergeant: *“The training has been useful. On one particular search it helped focus my mind planning the search strategy and helped me understand issues around the thoughts of the individual prior to going missing and where they may go.”*

2015 Police Sergeant: *“The family feedback ... was they were really impressed with the Police, they felt valued and felt we valued [the missing person] too.”*

2015 Search Advisor: *“I am more aware of what the missing person may be experiencing or considering, particularly when we are able to open a dialogue with them by email or telephone.”*

(2) Direct influence on police policy (standards and operations): The research has directly influenced England and Wales *Approved Professional Practice on Missing Persons* (2016) and Police Scotland’s *Standard Operating Procedures for Missing Persons* (2014). These combined changes direct officers across the UK to adopt good practice in providing ‘return interviews’ when adults go missing *and* provide more consistent and compassionate liaison with families in missing cases, two core recommendations from the research.

Letter of evidence: *“Police Scotland is in the process of making significant changes into its management and investigation of missing persons. ... The ESRC reports and recommendations have directly influenced our Standard Operational Guidance (SOP) launched in October 2014 (sections 16 and 19) issued to 13–14,000 staff. These sections relate to ‘Family Partnership’ and ‘Management of the Return’ where we have requested that return interviews require to take place. In addition, we have included a new section on good practice family liaison work.”* (5.4, National Missing Person Strategic Co-ordinator, Police Scotland, 2014)

Letter of evidence: *“I can confirm ... that the ‘Geographies of Missing People’ research project has had significant and far-reaching impacts within the police service in England, Wales and Scotland in terms of provision of new officer education materials and adjustments to operational guidance.”* (5.4, Manager UK Bureau of Missing Persons, 2015)

Police Scotland also now report that 91.3% of all cases have had a return interview since 2017 (5.5). Return interviews are critical to future prevention and the research has directly influenced their adoption since the SOP in 2014 (as evidenced above). The impacts of these changes in professional practice in (1) and (2) are also being assessed at a sector level in Scotland via the current evaluation of the *National Framework* (2020: see below) (5.6).

(3) Directly changing government policy guidance with implications for professional practice: Parr was invited as a research expert, using the research findings, to serve on two different Scottish Government Working Groups to help develop the first national government policy guidance on missing people: the *National Framework for Missing Persons in Scotland* (2017). This guidance had four main objectives and an implementation plan to support a new multi-agency approach to deliver best practice for missing people and their families across all areas of Scotland. Parr was then invited to Chair an *Independent Working Group For Missing Persons* (2019-2021) to evaluate the impact of these developments, and this group reported to the Scottish Government Minister for Community Safety in 2020 highlighting evidence of good practice and areas for improvement (5.6).

Letter of evidence: *“Professor Parr and the research gathered in the ‘Geographies of Missing People’ have played a critical role in the development of the Framework.”* (5.6, Scottish

Government Lead on the National Missing Person's Framework for Scotland, 2017)

Letter of evidence: *“Professor Parr’s ‘Geographies of Missing People’ research helped to inform and shape the Framework and so it is very welcome that she has continued to help guide this work since publication in 2017. Professor Parr’s national reputation in missing persons research has been important in taking this work forward and that is why I asked her to Chair the Working Group for Missing People in 2019 ... The Working Group’s update report [was] published on 10 September 2020 ... The recommendations have been well received and will help inform and influence the next steps the Scottish Government takes ... to implement the Framework’s aims through policy development and investment to enhance the good practice already in place.”* (5.6, **Minister for Community Safety**, 2020)

(4) Directly influencing the Missing People Charity services and policy priorities: The charity Missing People has directly used the research findings to develop new service interventions (eg. the *Aftercare Service, Wales*) to address the needs of returned missing people in their service strategy. The charity co-delivered a series of *National Conversation Events* in 2016 (5.7) with Parr to lead sector change on professional response to return. Parr is part of a group that oversees the work of the Missing People’s *National Co-ordinator for Scotland*, a post funded by the Scottish Government as a result of the National Framework. The research is thus being used in ways that directly benefit missing people and their families via charity developments. To support implementation the Scottish government commissioned the *National Training for the Efficacy of the Scottish National Framework* (2017–2018), and Parr worked with Missing People to provide new ‘returned discussion’ training for 342 multi-sector professionals in 85% of Scotland’s local authority areas. Evaluation shows increased knowledge and capacity to help returned missing persons by non-police professionals: 100% of trainees report being better able to conduct a return discussion (5.7, **Missing People Charity Report**, 2019).

Letter of evidence: *“The research has had a huge impact on the charity, both in terms of our direct service provision and on our policy and campaigning work. We have used some of the key findings of the original research to build a case for funding a pilot of a pioneering new service – Aftercare. I have been working closely with Hester Parr on the ‘Returned Missing’ brief. The charity invested staff time and resource in these events ... They have been extremely effective interventions – raising the issue of prevention and response at a national level.”* (5.7, **Research Manager, Missing People Charity**, 2017)

Letter of evidence: *“As Director of Policy and Development at the Missing People charity, I can confirm that the ‘Geographies of Missing People’ research findings and recommendations had direct influence on new service developments at the charity. As a result of the research we also worked with Hester Parr to put in place a series of event on ‘return’ in 2015 and 2016. We continue to be influenced by the research findings in our policy and practice work. The research has had significant impact on both service delivery and policy priorities in the charity and beyond.”* (5.7, **Director of Policy and Development, Missing People Charity**, 2020)

Missing People invited Parr to give evidence at MP Ann Coffey’s Westminster All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) to safeguard vulnerable adults (5.7). This meeting led to the establishment of the National Task and Finish Group to improve multi-agency response to missing people in England.

(5) Sector recognition of impact (peer reviewed): The research impact described above has been recognised in a series of national awards (5.8).

(6) International reach: The research has international reach, being disseminated via the Australian Federal Police and influencing the Australian NGO Missing Persons Advocacy Network (MPAN): *‘it would be very safe to say that the work that you’ve produced has undoubtedly impacted the scene here in Australia’* (5.9, **Founder and CEO, MPAN**, 2020); and, relatedly, MPAN has now developed a strategy to ‘humanise’ missing people.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Professional practice change via linked training resources: Over 138,000 UK police officers have been linked to our research resources via two main education modules: Data provided by Digital Services Business Coordinator, College of Policing.

5.2 Direct change in police professional practice: Letter of Testimony from PSNC Lead Training Officer for Missing Search.

5.3 Direct change in police professional practice: 300+ training evaluation sheets.

5.4 Directly influencing change in police standards and operating procedures: Letters of Testimony relating to direct policy and guidance change from sector leaders in England and Scotland, plus linked documentary sources: **(a)** UK College of Policing (CoP) *Approved Professional Practice* (APP) 'Missing Persons Investigations' (published 2016) directly references the research: <https://www.app.college.police.uk/app-content/major-investigation-and-public-protection/missing-persons/missing-person-investigations/#additional-resources-to-support-the-search-for-missing-people> (Section 4, p.6); and **(b)** Police Scotland *Standard Operating Procedures Missing Persons* (SOP) (published 2015) includes new sections directly influenced by the research: <https://www.scotland.police.uk/spa-media/zkakdnnc/missing-person-investigation-sop.pdf> (Sections 16 and 19).

5.5 Police Scotland annual report <https://theorkneynews.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/ps-missing-persons-annual-report-2017-18.pdf>, p.10, reports the 'return interview' rate for 2017-18.

5.6 Direct involvement in the policy development of the first Scottish Government *National Framework for Missing persons in Scotland*: Published in May 2017 (with 'missing people's stories' inserted) and Letter of Testimony from Scottish Government Lead for Missing available. Minister for Community Safety in 2017 public speech thanking Parr. Current MSP Minister Letter of Confirmation of Parr's influence, research-led direct change and *Working Group* evaluation report 2020.

5.7 Directly changing service development and strategic policy direction in the UK Missing People Charity: Letters of Testimony from senior staff in the charity, Research Manager, 2009–2017, and the current Director of Policy and Development, 2020. **Direct input into multi-sector training:** 342 signed up for 2017-18 Scottish Government funded training on supporting returned missing people, designed by Parr and partners. Full audit report compiled by Missing People in 2019 and summary email is available. Email from Missing People Charity confirming direct involvement in 2020 roll out of eLearning.

5.8 Sector awards for social and policy impact: Relating to *submission of evidence* for: ESRC *Outstanding Impact on Society Award* (2015); University of Glasgow *Best Policy and Practice Knowledge Exchange Award* (2017); Royal Geographical Society 'Back Award' for *Research into Policy* (2018).

5.9 Geographical reach into Australia: Email from NGO MPAN in Australia confirming influence in Australian context. Profiled in the Australian Missing Persons Conference 2017 and featured on the Australian Federal Police Website.