

A REVIEW OF UNCLEARED MISSING PERSON CASES  
AND POLICE RESPONSES IN ALBERTA

by

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A MAJOR PAPER SUBMITTED  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

In the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice

Michael J. Sekela 2010

UNIVERSITY OF THE FRASER VALLEY

Summer 2010

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## **Abstract**

Research into the topic of missing person cases in Canada indicates a gap between understanding the complete extent of this issue and the police response to such cases. Within the Canadian policing community, it is evident that there is a consensus regarding the value in developing a national missing persons program that would include a national database, a national public website, streamlined policies and investigational procedures, and strategic partnerships. However, it is not yet clear how such a program would be developed and sustained. Presently, there exist isolated Provincial responses to this most important topic. This major paper will focus on the Province of Alberta and examine the extent of uncleared missing person cases and the associated police responses. This research commenced with a review of available statistics on uncleared missing persons cases in Alberta in an effort to provide an accurate reflection of the current state of uncleared missing persons cases in the Province. The research then examined the associated police responses and concluded with a discussion centering on the matter of how police respond to missing persons cases in Alberta. Recommendations from this paper have already been implemented in Alberta and others are being further considered for use across Canada.

## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to thank the following people who have provided enormous encouragement and championed me towards the completion of this study. I am most appreciative to have had the opportunity of completing this study under the supervision and mentorship of Dr. Darryl Plecas. His passion, constant availability, enthusiasm, and sense of humor allowed me to complete this lifelong goal. His unrelenting drive for research and educational advancement was not only contagious, but allowed me to enjoy the challenges along the way. I also wish to thank Dr. Irwin Cohen, my second supervisor, for his encouragement, academic excellence, and his challenging me to make the most of this study. His knowledge of the educational process and assistance during the classroom academics prompted me to continue to strive for a thorough and meaningful description of the key research areas. I also wish to thank the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who have graciously assisted in the funding of my academic endeavors, and supported me throughout this project. This gratitude is also extended to all police agencies in Alberta for allowing me and my research assistants to access their materials. I also wish to acknowledge the dedication and commitment of the many Project KARE analytical and research assistants. Without the assistance of Camille Fedoruk, Tara Klatt, Claire Tonnellier, and Robb Pearson, the research would not have been gathered in such a timely fashion. In particular, I wish to mention my coworker Sean Beckett. He is the lead analyst on Project KARE and the key founder of the Alberta Missing Persons / Unidentified Human Remains Initiative. Finally, I wish to thank my family, who provided me with background support in numerous ways. My wife Brenda and my daughters Malissa and Jessica provided quiet support on the home front during my studies.

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## Introduction

Despite rapid advancements in technologies that allow people within our society to keep in constant communication and connect effortlessly with one another, there are still many cases in which a person goes and remains missing from friends and family. These cases, specifically those in which a person cannot be located for a lengthy period of time, are of great concern both to those close to the missing individual and the public as a whole. Across Canada, the number of cases in which a person has been missing for a long period of time ranges in the thousands, with the number of lives disrupted by the inability to locate a loved one even higher. As the disappearance of any one individual may be the result of other problems (i.e. mental illness, marginalization, or criminal behavior), the issue of missing persons is multifaceted, concurrently focusing on determining what happened to the person, finding him or her alive and safe, and preventing others from going missing. In Canada, the challenge of addressing these matters is an important issue for police.

The true extent of the problem of unsolved missing persons cases in Canada is difficult to discern. As of November of 2006, there were a total of 10,417 missing persons entered in Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) database (Federal-Provincial-Territorial Missing Women Working Group, 2007). Of the 10,417, more than 3,000 were individuals reported missing from other countries and who were in some way connected to, but were not necessarily residing in, Canada. The remaining 7,327 cases represent individuals who were reported missing within Canada and were entered on CPIC by Canadian police agencies. Of those Canadian cases, approximately one-third (2,479 or 33.8%) of missing persons were missing for more than 20 years. Moreover, there are currently 300 entries on CPIC of unidentified human remains found in Canada along with two entries made on behalf of U.S. authorities. However, due to several

record keeping problems across the country, these numbers likely represent either an underestimate or an overestimate of the actual cases that currently exist in Canada in regards to unsolved missing persons and unidentified human remains cases.

Developing appropriate strategies to deal with the challenges of missing persons cases is a difficult task since a person's status as 'missing' can change quickly in some cases. A consultation report released by Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada (PSEPC) (2005) indicated that there were over 100,000 reports of missing persons annually in Canada, with around 4,800 persons still recorded as missing after one year. However, there was an average increase of 270 new, long-term missing persons annually (PSEPC, 2005). Furthermore, about 20 to 30 new or partial sets of human remains are discovered each year in Canada (PSEPC, 2005). Therefore, despite the fact that only a small percentage of people reported missing remains unfound for a long period of time, it is for that relatively small number of cases that an appropriate strategy is most important.

Currently, there are at least seven different law enforcement missing persons programs across Canada. In addition, there are numerous other missing persons initiatives run by various provincial, national, and international agencies operating under various mandates and providing various levels of service, data collection, and sharing practices. However, there is very little consistent collaboration, centralized leadership, dedicated resources, and very few systems in place that facilitate effective and efficient collection and sharing of information in a timely fashion. While it would seem that there is a consensus regarding the value of developing a national missing persons program that would include a national database, streamlined policies and investigational procedures, and strategic partnerships, it is not yet clear how such a program would be developed and sustained. More specifically, there is currently little direction or

leadership in place to facilitate the creation of a national missing persons program. Also, there is no program in place to sustain the on-going use of such a national database. On a positive note, since the commencement of this major paper, an effort has been made by police agencies across this country to at least create a national missing persons database and website.

Although the issue of missing persons is of concern across the country, as well as internationally, since I was formerly the officer in charge of Project KARE, an initiative of the Alberta RCMP partially focused on missing persons investigations within its jurisdictions, the focus of this major paper is specific to the province of Alberta. The purpose of this major paper is to provide detailed information on the police practices used to investigate missing persons cases in Alberta in order to identify deficient areas as well as strategies that represent promising practices. To accomplish this, Chapter 1 presents a thorough background on the issue of missing persons, exploring the definition of a “missing person” and the reasons why individuals go missing. Chapter 2 discusses the nature and extent of uncleared missing persons cases in the province of Alberta using original data collected through an initiative of Project KARE. An examination of the police practices used to investigate missing persons files in Alberta is presented in Chapter 3. Finally, Chapter 4 offers the conclusions of this paper and some recommendations for future policy directions. The findings from this paper are intended to contribute to the ongoing effort to improve the quality of service with regard to missing persons investigations in Alberta and the rest of Canada.

## Chapter 1: Background

In recent years, there has been a great deal of attention paid to the issue of missing persons in Canada, specifically those cases involving vulnerable women living “high risk” lifestyles. Although these cases do not represent the largest subset of missing persons investigations, they serve to demonstrate how the problem of missing persons may be indicative of greater social evils. Police departments, advocacy groups, and the media from several major Canadian cities (Vancouver, Prince George, Edmonton, Regina, Southern Ontario, etc) identified the disappearance of dozens of marginalized women over a period of about 20 years (Federal-Provincial-Territorial Missing Women Working Group, 2007). Many of the women were sex-trade workers with drug addictions and little contact with family members who could verify their known whereabouts. In many cases, the missing persons investigations ended with the discovery of the remains of these women at crime scenes. These examples demonstrate the seriousness of the issue of missing persons and the need to further examine current police practices in relation to the handling of missing persons investigations in Canada. Perhaps by improving the way investigations are conducted, cases can be solved in larger numbers and in shorter time periods, potentially preventing future cases of predatory acts and hopefully reuniting missing persons with their friends and families.

According to Hirschel and Lab (1988), there is little research on the problem of missing persons in terms of actual number of missing persons, the characteristics of those missing, or the circumstances surrounding their disappearance. However, there has been research focused on topics such as “at risk” groups that go missing, the reasons why people go missing, and risk assessment tools (Newiss, 1999). This chapter will review what is currently known about the issue of missing persons. It begins by exploring the definition of “missing” in the context of

missing persons investigations. Next, there is a description of the general characteristics of people who go missing. The final section of this chapter reviews the reasons why people go missing. All three of these areas, the who, the why, and the definition of missing, are critical to the discussion, as it will provide the reader with the foundation for the police responses section of this paper. Until one understands all three areas of the issue of missing persons, it is difficult to examine the appropriate police responses to finding these categories of persons.

### **Defining “Missing” Persons**

A review of the missing persons literature and, in particular, a review of the material in a 2005 publication of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) entitled *Guidance on the Management Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons* highlights the guidelines on police levels of service when dealing with missing persons, including risk assessments, investigating reports, developing policies and roles, taking a multi-agency approach, supporting family needs, training staff, and preserving crime evidence. This manual provides a simple, yet effective, definition of a missing person. The ACPO defines a missing person as:

anyone whose whereabouts is unknown whatever the circumstances of disappearance. They will be considered missing until located and their well-being or otherwise established. There will be circumstances where a person is missing but police involvement may not be required, ie, tracing a long lost relative. Appropriate action may be referral to other relevant agencies that may provide assistance. The investigation into a missing person begins at the point of first notification to the police (ACPO, 2005: 8).

Definitions of missing persons vary considerably, and there is no standard definition of the term. The ACPO definition above is concise, inclusive, and simple. The one and only potential weakness is the idea that the investigation into a missing person begins at the reporting or notification to police. Police themselves could initiate an investigation as will be explained further on. Thus, depending on one's perspective, "missing person" might include any or all of

the following categories: lost person of sound mind; lost person of confused mind; abducted person; absent friend; and/or a runaway from unsatisfactory non-domestic situation (Swanton and Wilson, 1989). With such varied and non-standard definitions, the first, and arguably the most important step in locating a missing person is to first have a standard definition across police agencies of what constitutes a missing person, thereby allowing for a report to be filed and acted upon at the very first opportunity.

As suggested by the above ACPO definition, missing people may or may not be reported missing to an official agency, such as the police. At the same time, in Alberta, it is also possible that a person may be reported missing by the police *prior to* any family intervention. This is seen as a best practice by many police agencies around the world because it is the most inclusive definition of a missing person. Other definitions of missing persons require notification to police by others. The proactive practice of being able to initiate an investigational file or ‘file a complaint of a missing person’ by police or anyone else is considered a best practice because the sooner an investigation is initiated, the greater the likelihood of locating the person. Critically, investigational avenues in missing persons cases are time sensitive, as witnesses forget what they have observed, physical evidence deteriorates, and leads are lost.

An example of another definition that is not as inclusive as the ACPO definition above was discussed by Swanton and Wilson (1989). In this case, the definition is “a missing person is one who, not being the subject of a lawful commitment order, is absent from his/her normal haunts in breach of the reasonable expectations and/or responsibilities of another by reason of abduction, altered state of consciousness or voluntary decision, and whose location is either not known or, if known, who is illegally detained.” This definition is an example of the potential complexity of determining who would be classified as missing. It also implies that the circumstances, by which a person goes

missing, while important to be aware of in terms of locating the missing person, are irrelevant to the practical definition of a missing person.

Not all policing agencies have policies that specifically define missing persons. This can greatly affect the consistency of missing persons investigations across jurisdictions. The lack of a missing person definition leads to a broad and varied interpretation. “Police agencies each have their own criteria as to which missing person reports are classifiable as such. It is a matter for each agency to decide how wide or how narrowly to cast its missing persons net in a practical sense” (Swanton, Wyles, Lincoln, Wilson, & Hill, 1988: 44). This statement serves as a reminder of the variance amongst policing agencies regarding what constitutes a missing persons investigation. It provides an example of how just one issue, the lack of a common definition, can set the stage for the differential application of investigational resources, if at all, to various categories of missing persons. The definition utilized and suggested in this paper is the adopting of the ACPO (2005) definition below with one addition. The adopting of the ACPO (2005) definition with the following addition: “the investigation into a missing person begins at the point of first notification to *or by* the police” allows an investigation to commence even before the notification to police. One definition, which is simple and applicable, stated:

Anyone whose whereabouts is unknown whatever the circumstances of disappearance. They will be considered missing until located and their well-being or otherwise is established. There will be circumstances where a lost person is missing but police involvement may not be required, ie, tracing a long lost relative. Appropriate action may be a referral to other relevant agencies that may provide assistance... the investigation into a missing person begins at the point of first notification to *or by* the police (Association of Chief Police Officers, 2005: 8).

The success of the participation of Alberta police agencies within Project KARE established the proactive approach as a “promising practice” and, as such, serves as the rationale for this recommended modification to the existing definition.

## Characteristics of Missing Persons

Generally, the issue of missing persons has focused on the groups of people whose disappearances have garnered a great deal of media attention. This may lead one to assume that missing persons cases predominantly involve children, females, and those considered to be living 'high risk' lifestyles. While these groups are represented in uncleared missing persons cases, and are of great concern because of the potential implications of predatory offenders, these groups are not typically highly represented. According to the British Columbia Missing Persons Centre (Federal-Provincial-Territorial Missing Women Working Group, 2007), as of 2006, only 30% of missing persons cases in Canada involved females. Further, while the percentage of cases involving women varied from province to province (e.g. 21% in British Columbia as compared to 39% in Ontario), males are consistently over-represented. The same over-representation is true with respect to "uncleared" missing persons cases. For example, Cohen, McCormick, and Plecas (2007), in their study of uncleared missing person cases in British Columbia, found that 82% of all missing person cases involved male subjects.

Advocacy groups, such as Amnesty International (Stolen Sisters Report, 2004), noted that Aboriginal women were over-represented in uncleared missing person cases. In fact, research is presently being undertaken by Aboriginal organizations to identify the specific factors that might contribute to their over-representation among those missing (and sometimes murdered). A report titled *Addressing Violence Perpetuated Against Aboriginal Women in Alberta* (Lambertus, 2007) is a current example of this type of research. The fact that Amnesty International researched and produced documentation commenting on the missing and murdered Aboriginal women provides further support of the importance of the issue of missing persons nationally and internationally.

In contrast to findings in Canada, Australian research found the issue of missing persons to be much less concentrated among specific groups. According to Samways (2006), while most missing persons in Australia are children and young people, men and women are reported in equal numbers, and they span all social classes and geographical areas.

## **Reasons People Go Missing**

### **Voluntarily vs. Involuntarily Going Missing**

A study by James, Anderson, and Putt (2008) provided an update on existing data on missing persons in Australia, United States, and Canada and identified at-risk groups. It included national estimates, reasons for going missing, searching for missing persons, and the resulting recommendations for preventative and supportive measures. These authors discussed the heavy utilization in the literature of the terms ‘voluntarily’ and ‘involuntarily’ gone missing. They suggested that these terms should not be used, since although they appeared simple in nature, the circumstances surrounding them were complex. A person, such as an Alzheimer patient, may have been deemed to have ‘voluntarily’ left his home and went missing when he was a victim of his medical condition and ‘involuntarily’ departed.

Rather than distinguishing between voluntary and involuntary, a ‘continuum of missing’ was proposed by Biehal, Mitchell, and Wade (2003). This ranged from intentional to unintentional absence, with intervals spanning ‘decided’ (relationship breakdown, escaping personal problems, escaping violence, and mental health problems), to ‘drifted’ (losing contact and a transient lifestyle, which means that people simply lost touch with their families and friends), to ‘unintentional absence’ (Alzheimer’s disease, other mental health problems, accident or misadventure, and miscommunication) to ‘forced’ (being a victim of crime, such as homicide). The work of James et al. (2008) also demonstrated that the categories in the data

collection process were so varied that they represented a continuum of reasons. The categories of reasons why people went missing used in the dataset presented in this major paper reflected the majority of categories discussed in previous research. These categories included runaway or wandered off, lost, accident, suicide, parental abduction with and without a custody order, foul play or kidnapping, unknown, and other.

### **Wandered Off / Run Away**

This category of missing person is consistently the most frequent reason indicated for the reporting of a missing person. As indicated in the Australian study by James, Anderson, and Putt (2008), young people in care are likely to run away more often than the rest of the young missing persons population. Police in all jurisdictions spend a great deal of effort in searching for this group of people. As indicated in Canadian research by Dalley (2006), the runaway category composed over three-quarters of the missing children reports. Additionally, more females than males run away, and, most often, they run away from their family residence. In terms of their general profile, over 80% of runaway children have a history of repeat or chronic running episodes. One challenge to the statistics on this type of missing person is that this category is consistently inflated by cases of someone reported missing as a runaway, but who often returns shortly afterwards only to repeat this pattern frequently (Cohen et al., 2008).

According to James et al. (2008), the reasons for missing persons to run away were varied. Young persons who ran away were more likely to do so if they were living in care. In particular, a chaotic home life, characterized by abuse, violence, or other dysfunction contributed to young people going missing. However, young people also went missing for reasons related to mental health and substance abuse, although not to the same degree as adults. School-related factors played an important role in the reasons why young people ran away, as bullying or issues with peers or teachers

may contribute to the desire to escape a negative peer or social situation (James et al., 2008). On the other hand, adults who went missing or wandered off did so primarily as a result of a medical condition. Biehal et al. (2008) concluded that the majority of adults who went missing unintentionally were people aged 60 and over suffering from dementia. Most other unintentional absences were linked to depression or to psychotic illnesses, where medication had been missed (Biehal et al. 2008).

### **Accident**

The category of missing individuals labeled as *accident* refers to cases where an individual goes missing as a result of some form of disappearance, such as an airplane crash, a boating accident, an avalanche, or a fire. In other words, the category of accident is assigned until a body is recovered, at which point the victim is removed from the list of missing persons. Circumstances where the individual go missing while they are alone are usually classified as an accident in that the intentions or motives of that individual are often not known, thereby preventing the categorization of the disappearance as a suicide, for example (Cohen et al., 2008). Not until the remains are found and the history, body, and scene examinations reveal other explanations will the category of missing be changed from accident to another category, such as suicide.

### **Parental Abduction**

The proportion of missing person cases classified as *parental abduction/kidnapping* is rather small in comparison to the other categories. In effect, situations in which an individual goes missing with or without an order happens very infrequently. However, this category is one of the few in which the data is very accurate as the police know who, when, and why the person went missing when this situation occurs. Dalley (2006) indicated that reports of both custody and non-custody parental abductions amounted to 326 cases in Canada. Within this group, more female children

than males were abducted. In the majority of the cases, a custody order was not in place. Of all the children abducted by a parent, nearly half (47 per cent) were under the age of five years, 28% between six and eleven years, and 25% were between 12 and 17 years of age. About three-quarters were last seen at their family residence. According to Finkelhor, Hotaling, and Sedlak (1992), parental abductions are much more common than stranger abduction, which necessitates the separation of these two categories to avoid making policy decisions to protect children based on the elevated number of missing children that are a result of parental abductions and do not culminate in predatory crimes often associated with stranger abduction.

### **Foul Play and Kidnapping**

In spite of the fact that victims of foul play and the circumstances surrounding the investigation receive the most media attention, there are relatively few cases where people go missing and are found deceased. Foy (2006) identified that of the 22 persons who go missing daily from a jurisdictional area of New South Wales, only 1% do not return or do not return safely as a result of foul play. This finding was supported by Tarling and Burrows' (2004) research of 1,008 persons who went missing in which 96% returned home safe within six months of their reported disappearance. This is not to diminish the trauma on the families, friends, and loved ones who grieve the other approximately 4% who do not make it home safely. Rather, it is to highlight the fact that, although one goes missing under suspicious circumstances, foul play occurs much less frequently than expected by the general population. Newiss (1999), in his research conducted in England, indicated that 0.3% of missing persons reports culminated in a fatal outcome. In a study by Biehal et al. (2008), less than 1% of missing persons were victims of crime.

In terms of Canada, Dalley (2006) reported that stranger abduction reports increased to 46 in 2006 from 30 in 2005. More females than males were reported missing within this category and over half of the children disappeared from their family residence. Of the children who went

missing within this category, 26% were under the age of 1 year old, and 28% were 14 and 15 years old. Newiss (2004) found that although one-quarter of the victims in the missing-homicide category of the study were between 10 and 18 years of age, the number was dwarfed by the sheer number of reports of missing children in this age range.

Despite the relatively small number of cases in which foul play occurred, the police resources expended toward the investigation and conclusion of these types of missing persons cases are great. This is the one of the primary reasons why further research on the issue of missing persons is of importance. Accurate information about these cases is necessary in order to make recommendations that will ensure that the identification of missing persons cases occurs effectively and efficiently, and that any uncleared cases are investigated properly. Recently, high profile initiatives, such as Project KARE in Alberta and Project EVENHANDEED in British Columbia, were conducted to address the problem of missing persons, especially those in which foul play was suspected. Although these initiatives indicated that actions had been taken toward improving service to the public in this area, further research on uncleared missing persons cases and police responses is a necessity to explore more appropriate policy directions.

## **Summary**

The importance of research into why people go missing sets the stage for the research conducted in this major paper. In Alberta, and across the country, depending on the category of cases, the numbers of reported missing persons represent either an underestimate or an overestimate of the actual number of uncleared missing persons and unidentified humans remains cases. Developing appropriate strategies to deal with the challenges of missing persons cases is a difficult task. Although there are numerous other missing persons initiatives run by various provincial, national, and international agencies, there is very little research in relation to who is actually missing across Canada. Without the understanding of who is missing and the

situation surrounding their disappearances, any attempt to make sense of the findings from the current research in Alberta would be limited. Using what is currently known about the definitions of missing, who goes missing, and why people go missing as a basis for understanding the findings from the current research, the following chapter presents data from the province of Alberta to add to the existing body of research on missing persons.

## **Chapter 2: Missing Persons in Alberta**

To provide a better understanding of the issue of missing persons specific to the province of Alberta, this chapter discusses the data available on all uncleared cases of missing persons across the province from 1967 to 2007. The data was pulled together by Project KARE analysts over two years ending in the spring of 2009 and represented an attempt to address concerns about the accuracy of data being referred to up to 2007. In particular, up until that time, it was not clear that all uncleared cases of missing persons were being recorded and entered into a database. At the same time, it was apparent that some uncleared cases remained uncleared when, in fact, they had been solved. Looking at the process used to build a more accurate data set is a good lesson on the need for to be clear about what uncleared missing persons data in any jurisdiction actually represents. Specifically, this chapter will describe the process by which the data was collected and ‘cleaned’ prior to analysis. Additionally, the chapter will provide a discussion of the data produced by the analysts with a view to providing a picture of the nature and extent of missing person cases in Alberta.

### **Data and the Need for Data Cleaning**

The Project KARE analysts who pulled together the data started with a list of those individuals who were listed on the CPIC database. CPIC is operated by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) under its National Police Services Branch. It was created in 1966 as a tool to assist the police in combating crime and has been operational since 1972. Once a record has been created in CPIC, only the originating agency has the authority to modify or remove it, leaving that agency solely responsible for the accuracy of that record. This can be a problem in cases where individual agencies do not update their files or ‘notify CPIC’ of a change in file status. This particular issue was made clear as KARE analysts sought to confirm the status of

missing person cases on CPIC. According to this database, as of the end of June 2007 (June 25<sup>th</sup>), a total of 863 individuals were listed as missing in nine of the eleven police jurisdictions in Alberta. However, the analysts did an audit and cleaning of the cases referred to on the CPIC database, and new cases of missing persons were added. By the time the data was cleaned through to March, 2009, it was determined that the number of uncleared missing persons cases in Alberta between January 1, 1967 and December 31, 2007 was 312.

No doubt it would have been better to be able to refer to cases more recently than 2007, but the problem was the time it takes to clean the more recent data. Beyond that, the accuracy of the picture presented could be skewed because most missing persons cases are solved. As the literature indicated, approximately 96% of all missing persons are located safe and well (Tarling and Burrows, 2004). Analyses conducted by Project KARE analysts confirmed that not only was this the case, but most cases are solved relatively quickly. Specifically, considering the 'Date Last Seen' period from June 18<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup>, 2007, while 92 people were reported as being last seen during this one-week period, a year later only four of those individuals were still missing. Accordingly, including 2008 data would have most certainly provided an over-representation of the real numbers of uncleared cases.

Obviously, there are missing person cases in Alberta that originated prior to 1967, but CPIC held only one file prior to that year. To explore the reason for this, a check was made with RCMP Archives and it was learned that missing persons files are retained until the person involved would have reached 110 years old or, when the individual's age was unknown, the information was kept for 92 years from the date reported missing. Further, it was learned that should any uncleared missing person file arrive in Archives, the director would send the file back to the police force of jurisdiction to retain the file until those time periods have expired. With this

in mind, a message was sent out requesting all police forces and the medical examiner to further check their record storage areas to confirm that no files existed. No police agency or representative from the office of the Chief Medical Examiner responded. Accordingly, for purposes of providing a picture of missing person cases in Alberta, we are left to work from 1967 forward.

The matter of cleaning the data for the analysts did not stop with determining the correct number of cases to be considered. Data cleaning also involved ensuring that the data contained in the files was as accurate as possible. To this end, KARE analysts obtained hardcopies of the files within RCMP jurisdictions. Hardcopy files were only obtained for the cases in which individuals were listed as missing for more than six months. In addition, hardcopies of all missing persons files were obtained from all Alberta municipal police agencies. These files were subsequently scanned into an electronic format and stored in portable document format (.pdf) on a secure network at the RCMP Project KARE office. In most instances, these files could be searched electronically for text. In the cases where handwritten text was scanned, a manual viewing was required. These files were reviewed by the Project KARE support staff and relevant information was manually entered into an electronic .pdf form called the Missing Persons Uncleared Cases Coding Sheet, developed in conjunction with researchers at the University of the Fraser Valley and RCMP "E" Division for purposes of data collection and standardization. Once the complete set of data was entered into the electronic coding sheets, it was extracted and imported by KARE analysts into a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) dataset for subsequent manipulation and statistical evaluation.

In attempting to code the files in question, it was quickly apparent to analysts that important descriptive data was commonly missing. In fact, analysts reported that many files

contained missing information on data fields normally of significance within a missing person investigation. For instance, information on tattoos and hair color were missing in several files. Upon learning this, analysts performed additional checks and otherwise took steps to correct these gaps in the data. This included querying different police systems, the Police Reporting and Occurrence System (PROS), the Edmonton Police Reporting and Occurrence System (EPROS), and the Alberta Public Safety Network (APSNet). All of this effort produced a dataset that enabled the KARE analysts to provide a set of 14 tables referred to in the next section.

## **Alberta Missing Person Statistics**

### **General Findings**

There were 312 uncleared files of persons who were reported missing between 1967 and 2007 included in this dataset. As Alberta is policed by both the RCMP and a number of municipal police agencies, missing person files originated from a number of different sources and KARE analysts produced a table to show these different sources (See Table 2.1). Specifically, the largest proportion (46 per cent) originated from RCMP jurisdictions (which included approximately 50% of the Alberta population), while the next largest proportions came, as might be expected, from the two largest cities in Alberta, namely Edmonton (29 per cent) and Calgary (22 per cent). As indicated in Table 2.1, the remaining 4% of cases originated from the remaining police jurisdictions in Alberta, including Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Camrose, Lacombe, Louis Bull, Blood Tribe, T'suu Tina, and Taber.

**Table 2.1: Missing Persons Cases by Police Jurisdiction in Alberta**

Agency	Total	Percent
RCMP	142	46%
EPS	91	29%
CPS	68	22%
Other	11	4%
Total	312	100%

*\*All percentages rounded*

It was also possible to consider the decade in which the uncleared missing persons file originated. As indicated in Table 2.2, the distribution was somewhat unexpected. Specifically, it would appear that the RCMP has disproportionately more longstanding uncleared missing person cases than other police agencies. Why this would be so is not clear. However, one might speculate that the difference or differences across agencies in general might be associated to differences across agencies in terms of recording keeping and/or clearance practices.

**Table 2.2: Uncleared Missing Persons Cases by Decade for Police Agencies in Alberta**

Agency	Prior to 1980	1980-1989	1990-1999	2000-2007
% RCMP	15	25	32	29
% EPS	4	7	15	74
% CPS	0	3	13	84
% Other	0	9	46	46
Overall	8	14	23	55

*\*All percentages rounded*

## Gender

A disproportionate percentage (66 per cent) of the uncleared missing persons cases in Alberta involved males. Table 2.3 presents the gender distribution of missing persons across policing jurisdictions. The percentage of males was somewhat higher in RCMP jurisdictions and somewhat lower in Edmonton. One possible explanation is that RCMP jurisdictions contain mainly rural settings, and males frequent the outdoors and go missing from boating, hunting, and camping activities in larger proportions than females.

**Table 2.3: Gender of Missing Persons in Alberta (by jurisdiction)**

Agency	% Males	% Females
RCMP	81	19
EPS	43	57
CPS	65	35
Other	64	36
Overall	66	34

*\*All percentages rounded*

## **Ethnicity**

As discussed in Chapter 1, differences in the incidence of missing persons cases between people of different ethnicity is an important aspect of the problem of missing persons. Table 2.4 presents the distribution of missing persons cases by ethnicity for each of the police jurisdictions considered. In terms of ethnic appearance, as expected given the ethnic distribution in the province, the majority of missing persons were Caucasians (67 per cent). However, this is a slight under-representation given that the total Caucasian population in Alberta is 81%. The most apparent finding related to ethnicity was the percentage of Aboriginal people involved in uncleared missing persons cases. Specifically, as demonstrated in Table 2.4, slightly more than one-quarter (22 per cent) of all cases across the province involved Aboriginal people. This was nearly four times the representation of First Nations persons in Alberta which is 5.9% (2006 Census). The differences were mainly within EPS and RCMP jurisdictions.

**Table 2.4: Ethnicity of Missing Persons in Alberta (by jurisdiction)**

	RCMP	EPS	CPS	Other	Alberta Overall
% Caucasian	73	56	67	73	67
% Aboriginal	25	29	10	9	22
% Other	1	10	8	9	5
% Black	0	5	9	0	3
% Asian	1	1	6	9	3

The distribution of missing persons cases in terms of ethnicity differences across the four decades was also considered (see Table 2.5). However, there were essentially no outstanding differences across the decades. For instance, as already noted, 22% of all missing persons cases across the entire time span involved an Aboriginal person, while prior to 1980, an Aboriginal person was involved in 21% of cases. During the 1990s, 22% of missing persons in Alberta were Aboriginal. There has been somewhat of an increase in ‘other’, Asian, and Black missing persons over the past two decades, but those increases were not inconsistent with Alberta becoming more ethnically diverse in recent decades.

**Table 2.5: Ethnicity of Missing Persons in Alberta (by decade)**

	Prior to 1980	1980 to 1989	1990 to 1999	2000 to 2007	Overall
% Caucasian	79	84	71	58	67
% Aboriginal	22	11	22	25	22
% Other	0	2	0	9	5
% Black	0	0	4	4	3
% Asian	0	2	3	3	3

*\*All percentages rounded*

An interesting pattern appeared, however, when the ethnicity of missing individuals in uncleared missing persons cases for both genders was considered. Specifically, as Table 2.6 demonstrates, Aboriginal people were substantially overrepresented among female missing persons – while only 18% of male missing persons were Aboriginal, 31% of female missing persons were of Aboriginal descent. Accordingly, it was not surprising that attention has been turned to the issue of Aboriginal women’s over-representation in missing person cases.

**Table 2.6: Ethnicity of Missing Persons in Alberta (by gender)**

	Of all males Missing	Of all females missing
% Caucasian	73	56
% Aboriginal	18	31
% Other	4	8
% Black	3	4
% Asian	3	2
Total	200	104

*\*All percentages rounded*

## Age

The average age of a missing person in Alberta (when reported missing) in an uncleared missing persons case was 34 years old. Considering jurisdictions, the average age is five years older in RCMP jurisdictions and six year younger in Edmonton (see Table 2.7). Notably, the difference would seem to be primarily related to the fact that a disproportionately low number of missing person cases in RCMP jurisdictions involved youth and a disproportionately high number of missing persons in uncleared cases in Edmonton involved youth (see Table 2.7).

**Table 2.7: Age of Missing Persons at Time Reported Missing**

Police Agency	% under the age of 18 (youth)	% 18 years and older (adults)	Average age
RCMP	7	93	39
EPS	34	66	28
CPS	27	74	32
Other	9	91	35
Total	19	81	34

*\*All percentages rounded*

Looking at the issue of age further, it can be seen from Table 2.8 that the average age of missing youth was 12 years old, while the average age for adults, as already noted, was 34 years old. However, while the average age fluctuated somewhat, it has not changed notably over the last four decades. Moreover, that is true for both youth and adults.

**Table 2.8: Age of Missing Persons at Time Reported Missing (by decade)**

Decade	Average age of youth	Average age of adults	Average age overall
prior to 1980	11	38	35
1980 to 1989	9	36	33
1990 to 1999	8	39	37
2000 to 2009	12	41	33
Decade Overall	12	39	34

More interesting are the figures presented in Table 2.9 that indicate that the average age of males and females from each of the policing jurisdictions. Specifically, when considering gender in uncleared missing persons cases, clearly women are younger than men. This trend is consistent across all policing jurisdictions. Overall, women are, on average, 29 years old when they go missing, whereas men were nearly eight years older at 37 years of age. Both women and men are, on average, older in RCMP jurisdictions. Further, the average woman in an RCMP jurisdiction (35 years old) was ten years older than a woman in Edmonton Police Service and nearly nine years older than a woman in Calgary.

**Table 2.9: Age of Missing Persons at Time Reported Missing (by Gender and Jurisdiction)**

	Average age of males	Average age of females	Overall average age
RCMP	40	35	40
EPS	32	25	28
CPS	34	26	32
Overall	37	29	34

Additionally, average age was considered in terms of ethnicity for both genders. Table 2.10 presents the average ages for each ethnic group, and there are some substantial differences in age between the ethnic groups. For instance, although Aboriginal males are, on average, the same age as Caucasian males (37 years old versus 38 years old respectively), Aboriginal women

are substantially younger (24 years old) than the average age of women missing persons in uncleared cases (29 years old). Black individuals of both genders are also substantially younger than individuals from other ethnic groups, as the average age of males and females were 22 years old and 23 years old respectively. The finding of note here is that women were consistently and substantially younger than their male counterparts. This difference is even greater when considering ethnicity. While there is virtually no difference in age between male Aboriginals and male Caucasians, there was an age difference of basically seven years between Aboriginal and Caucasian females.

***Table 2.10: Age of Missing Persons at Time Reported Missing (by Gender and Ethnicity)***

	Mean Age of Males in years	Mean Age of Females in years	Mean Age Overall in years
Caucasian	38	31	36
Aboriginal	37	24	31
Other	27	31	29
Black	22	23	22
Asian	34	41	36
Other	27	8	29
Overall	37	29	34

Overall, it may seem that the average age (34 years old) of missing persons is quite high. However, this age represented uncleared missing persons cases that exceeded six months and did not include the large number of runaways who would generally be younger, but would be located within the six month timeframe. One could speculate that Aboriginal women in this sample were much younger than other females and Aboriginal males because they migrated to the larger urban areas at a younger age.

## Reasons for Going Missing

Analyses were also conducted on the reasons why a person went missing. In over one-third (35 per cent) of all cases of missing persons, the reason indicated was “unknown” (see Table 2.11). The next most commonly identified reason was “accident” (13 per cent), with both runaway and wandered off representing just over 12% each. Foul play was suspected in 11% of cases. Interestingly, the RCMP had a much higher percentage of cases involving accidents (29% compared to 13% for Alberta overall), and cases involving individuals wandering off (23% compared to 12% for Alberta overall). However, the RCMP has a substantially lower percentage of cases where the reason was “unknown”. As shown in Table 2.11, only 10% of cases in RCMP jurisdictions recorded the cause as unknown compared to 40% in Edmonton and 67% of cases in Calgary. It is difficult to know why this substantial difference exists and is beyond the scope of this analysis to speculate. However, it is perhaps one more thing pointing towards the need of greater consistency in the way in which missing persons cases are described, investigated, and recorded.

**Table 2.11: Reasons Why Persons Go Missing (by jurisdiction)**

Reason Missing	RCMP	EPS	CPS	Other	Alberta Overall
% Unknown	10	40	67	67	35
% Accident	29	0	1	0	13
% Wandered Off	23	7	1	0	12
% Runaway	3	30	7	0	12
% Kidnap/Foul Play	16	6	6	8	11
% Suicide	13	8	3	8	9
% Parental Abduction	2	5	11	8	5
% Other	4	3	4	8	4

*\*All percentages rounded*

Table 2.12 presents the breakdown of missing persons cases in which the reason for going missing was classified ‘unknown’ across the four time periods for each policing jurisdictions. It would appear that there were a greater number of such cases in the current decade. This is especially the case for Calgary and Edmonton, while the RCMP jurisdictions do not show the same trend. It is not clear why this is the case. Once again, this is possibly reflective of the need to develop a consistent and leading-edge approach to missing persons investigations and record keeping methods for all police agencies in the province in Alberta.

**Table 2.12: Persons Missing For “Unknown” Reasons (By Decade and Jurisdiction)**

Decade	RCMP percent	EPS percent	CPS percent	Other percent	Alberta Overall
% Prior to 1980	7	10	0	0	5
% 1980 – 1989	14	5	0	0	4
% 1990 – 1999	50	15	10	50	20
% 2000 – 2007	29	69	90	50	72

*\*All percentages rounded*

As an aside, an analysis was conducted with respect to gender and found no substantial differences between cases involving men and women. Specifically, 44% of cases involving males were recorded as ‘Unknown’ and 47% of cases involving females were ‘Unknown’. Similarly, when considering differences with respect to ethnic appearance, it appeared that 42% of cases involving Caucasians were recorded as Unknown compared to 48% of cases involving a person of Aboriginal descent. In effect, it does not appear that gender or ethnicity had any influence on whether a reason for going missing was indicated. Rather, the combination of time period and policing jurisdiction appeared to have a much greater influence on the number of ‘unknown’ cases. The category ‘unknown’ was used where there was no indication on file as to why the person went missing.

## Summary

This chapter provided the results of a review of figures regarding uncleared missing persons specific to the province of Alberta. That review clearly raised more questions than answers. Specifically, while it can be seen that there were differences in missing persons cases across jurisdiction and in term of gender, ethnicity, age, and reasons why people go missing, it remained unclear why these difference existed. However, this reality is precisely why it is necessary to be clear about how figures respecting missing person cases are derived. With this in mind, this chapter provided a background for exploring the general characteristics of uncleared missing persons cases in the province of Alberta.

In effect, there were 312 uncleared files of persons reported missing between 1967 and 2007 included in this review. The number of missing persons cases across the various policing jurisdiction of Alberta were, for the most part, equally distributed between the three major police agencies in the province. Almost half (46 per cent) came from an RCMP jurisdiction and the majority of remaining cases were split between Edmonton and Calgary Police Services.

There were several important findings highlighted in this chapter. One main observation that requires further research is the fact that there is an apparent disproportionate number of the uncleared missing persons cases in Alberta that involved males (66 per cent). Moreover, males went missing for many reasons, but were much more likely to go missing as a result of an accident or suicide than were females.

Another important finding was with respect to the percentage of Aboriginal people involved in uncleared missing persons cases. Consistent with other reports about the over-representation of Aboriginal people (Stolen Sisters Report, 2004), the current data indicated that

22% of all cases across the province involved someone of Aboriginal descent which was nearly four times that of the representation of First Nations persons in Alberta.

Very few RCMP cases involved youth (7 per cent), while EPS and CPS had a greater number of files involving youth (34% and 27%, respectively). Perhaps this is explained by youth migrating to the city where they are at a greater risk for going missing. Another finding of note was that women were, on average, substantially younger than men when they went missing. This difference was even greater when considering ethnicity. While there was virtually no difference in age between male Aboriginals and male Caucasians, there was an age difference of basically seven years between Aboriginal and Caucasian females. Perhaps this can also be explained by the higher proportion of younger female Aboriginal women migrating to urban centres.

In relation to the high proportion of cases in which Unknown was provided as the reason for going missing, it does not appear that gender or ethnicity had any influence on whether a reason for going missing was indicated in the files. Rather, the combination of time period and policing jurisdiction appeared to have a much greater influence on number of 'unknown' cases. Both explanations may be attributed to the record keeping practices of the various police agencies. This is one area in which improving police practices may be able to provide better information to assist with the investigation of missing persons cases.

## **CHAPTER 3: POLICE RESPONSES TO MISSING PERSONS CASES IN ALBERTA**

### **BACKGROUND**

Presently, there are eleven police services registered with the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police (AACP) responsible for the investigation of missing persons (AACP, 2007). Alberta police services vary widely in size. For example, Taber has 12 sworn members and five support staff serving a resident population of approximately 8,000 people (Taber Town website, 2007), while the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, in Alberta, have 2,200 sworn and civilian members and 550 support staff (R.C.M.P., 2007). First Nation police services include the Blood Tribe, Louis Bull Police Service, and the Tsuu T'ina Nation Police Service. Regardless of the size of the Alberta police service, each has its own policies, procedures, and protocols for the investigation of missing Alberta citizens.

For the most part, however, the majority of the Province of Alberta is policed by three large agencies: the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, which operates under a provincial contractual agreement; the Edmonton Police Service; and the Calgary Police Service. As of 2006, Alberta had a population of 3,290,350 (Statistics Canada, 2007). According to the 2006 Census (Statistics Canada, 2007), the Edmonton Police Service serves a population of 730,372 within its city boundary and the Calgary Police Service serves a population base of 988,193. The Edmonton and Calgary Police Services have officer/support staff compliments of 1340/456 (Edmonton Police Service, 2006) and 1537/637 (Calgary Police Service, 2006), respectively. Therefore, the Edmonton and Calgary Police Services serve over half (52 per cent) of Alberta's population, and the R.C.M.P. polices the remainder of the province, with the exception of a few smaller cities and towns, such as Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Camrose, and Taber.

At present, it is a police responsibility to investigate missing persons files and each respective Alberta police agency has various policies to deal with these often resource-intense files. To better explain the Alberta police response to missing persons files, it is beneficial to explain the process or steps of investigating missing persons files in detail. The best way to accomplish this is to break down each stage of the process from the receiving or originating of the file to the final locating or attempts of locating the missing person. In doing so, this chapter will discuss the existing promising practices at each stage in the investigation, as well as identify existing gaps.

Like the R.C.M.P., each of the other police services has its own methodology for the prioritization, handling, and investigation of missing persons within its respective jurisdiction. Although the policies, procedures, and investigational directions of several police jurisdictions may be quite similar, they all still have their own separate and specific investigational and administrative policies and methodologies relating to the handling of missing person cases. The discussions in this major paper are targeted primarily at the three largest police forces in the province since they have the great majority of all the missing person files in the province of Alberta. This chapter and the recommendations presented in Chapter 4 may or may not apply to the smaller police forces, many of which had few or no uncleared missing persons cases, to a lesser extent than the larger three, however all police agencies can benefit from the suggested practices in this paper.

### **Missing Persons Definitions**

Not only does each service have its own set of policies and procedures for handling missing persons, but each has a unique definition of a *missing person*. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police defines a missing person as “a person whose location is unknown and who

might be in need of assistance to be reunited with his/her family, the victim of an offence, in critical need of medical attention, and someone who is mentally impaired and unable to care for himself/herself or who might pose a danger to his/her safety or to that of others” (R.C.M.P. policy OM 37.3.1). The strength of this definition is the inclusiveness of those who are considered missing. Of note, only 18% of police agencies in the Province of Alberta have a specific definition of a missing person. Instead, most police agencies have created missing persons categories, such as runaway juveniles, wandering persons, youth, and those who are aged or infirm. Currently, although the policies of all Alberta police forces relating to missing person files are very similar, there is still an absence of a common definition.

The lack of a specific definition or too broad a definition often leads to the creation of a specific set of sub-policies and classifications of missing persons. Should the missing person not fall within these categories, a file may not be created. This lack of a formal definition may not at first appear to be a major issue, but is a potential gap in the service delivery to someone who is reported missing. The lack of a definition can lead a police agency to refuse to acknowledge a file as a missing person case. For example, some Alberta police agencies may not consider a specific individual to be ‘missing’ if that individual was not reported missing by a family member. Also, some categories, such as Alzheimer patients, children under twelve years of age, and suicidal persons will elicit an immediate response, whereas other “non-suspicious” missing persons, such as “not at risk” runaways and “information only” files may never be recommended for investigation and, therefore, not considered a missing person case. In such instances, the file may never be added to CPIC or only minimal investigational procedures would be applied to the call. This has the potential of allowing cases to fall through the cracks and not be deemed missing persons cases.

A missing person file is one of the most underestimated and complicated files a police officer investigates. The size, scope, and whether an investigation is even launched are dependent upon the definition of the missing person and the circumstances surrounding the disappearance. The lack of a common definition for all police agencies across the province provides a partial explanation of why there exists such inconsistency in investigational strategies for the various citizens of Alberta. The greater the number of options available for interpretation by investigators and supervisors, the greater the probability of too broad an interpretation being applied to the situation, thereby leading to various levels of application of investigational procedures and potentially none at all. Even though it can be argued that all of Alberta police agencies do have some form of risk assessment tool, the potential exists for a report of a missing person to be ignored because there was no consistent definition of a missing person attached to the risk assessment tool.

## **Opening a Missing Persons File**

### **Third Party Reporting**

Traditionally, the investigation into a missing person begins when the police are first notified. The normal commencement of a reported missing person occurs when the complaint is received by telephone, in person, at the police station, by letter, website, or facsimile. The next step in a missing persons investigation within current police practices relates to after a person is reported as missing and the police choose to accept the file as an “active missing persons file”. This step is an assessment of the type of complaint and requires the completion of an intake or complaint form. The form is designed to acquire pertinent information to assist in the location of missing persons. The form also allows for the gathering of information that can be added to databases, websites, and investigational files. Every police agency in Alberta has some form by

which this is accomplished. However, each agency has varying policies and procedures depending on the category of the missing person, and each one of these categories evokes a different response. It should be noted that since the start of this research, the Edmonton Police Service has amended its policy to have each case assessed against a risk assessment tool and, depending on the outcome, a specially designated investigational approach will occur.

An examination of existing police policies in Alberta suggests that evaluation tools may be inadequate since they are too generic. Specifically, 85% of Alberta police agencies have an evaluation tool that does not place a numerical value on the type of complaint. This represents another area in the process of investigating missing persons cases that requires improvement. The tools describe situations, such as “very urgent”, “urgent”, and “least urgent”. An example is the RCMP’s policy where the “very young and very old are ranked very urgent, while all other types of missing person complaints are ranked least urgent and fall under the category of other” (R.C.M.P. Policy ops 37-3-2). The inadequacies regarding generic risk assessment tools are that the person who completes the form may not assign the appropriate risk and, therefore, inadequate resources may be assigned to the file. On the other hand, there is a difficulty in the creation of a truly objective form. Newiss’s research in England clearly identified that “demographic and circumstantial factors which, alone or in combination, have great difficulties in offering a high level of certainty about a particular outcome occurring” (2005: 214-215).

One potential solution to this problem is an assessment tool that is similar to the one being utilized within Project KARE called the Person of Interest Priority Assessment Tool (POIPAT). The POIPAT is a system for assessing the probability that any given Person of Interest (POI) was responsible for any or all of the missing person cases included in Project KARE. This allows the project management to direct resources necessary to target the high

priority cases first. It should be noted that a similar tool exists within the ACPO guide in an appendix where there is a risk assessment/decision-making guide (ACPO, 2005). However, the POIPAT possesses a numerical value that enables the joining of a specific category with specific policies that accompany the numerical value with greater details in the collection, collation, and analysis of missing person cases. Like any similar tool, when used properly, the POIPAT assists the investigator or police force of jurisdiction with a decision-making formula. Most missing persons risk assessment tools only have categories without numerical values. By having a tool, such as the POIPAT, the numerical values have greater details that serve to categorize missing persons cases more specifically which can aid in allocating the proper amount of investigational resources at the appropriate times.

### **Proactive Reporting**

Proactive reporting by police themselves is considered a best practice and was established within Project KARE and entitled the Pro Active Team. The Pro Active Team is a concept derived from the review of similar investigations in North America. Project KARE itself is a task force established as the result of a three-phased initiative called the High Risk Missing Persons Project. One of the mandates of this Project was to investigate numerous homicides involving sex trade workers that occurred in the Greater Capital Region of Edmonton. The goal of the Pro Active Team is to gather intelligence that may assist Project KARE in the investigation into serial offender(s). It is also tasked with collecting information on the High Risk Persons and Sex Trade Workers in the Edmonton area. Information, such as the name, age, distinctive markings, physical description of the individual, and a voluntary DNA sample, is gathered. This is a proactive approach that provides investigators with a starting point and the information necessary to increase the likelihood of success should a registered individual be noticed missing, reported

missing, or found deceased. Additional information about Project KARE may be obtained through its website at [www.kare.ca](http://www.kare.ca).

Project KARE's Pro Active Team is made up of a number of highly trained investigators who immerse themselves in the world of high risk persons. The investigators do not wear uniforms, but are easily identified by a Project KARE identification card worn on their outer garments and a large Project KARE logo on the front of their shirts. The team also maintains contact with various social agencies operating in downtown Edmonton, as well as over 109 government, non-government organizations, and law enforcement agencies. All share the goal of minimizing the risk of having other high risk persons go missing or murdered. By working in concert with these other agencies, the Pro Active Team can provide an updated overview of Project KARE to all law enforcement staff and community groups, as well as keep social agencies updated on threats and other concerns.

A 'High Risk' person is someone whose behavior, lifestyle, or circumstances places them at a high or extremely high risk of becoming a victim to violent crime (Wilson, 2004). It should be noted that high risk missing persons are some of the most vulnerable people in society. These individuals are usually reported missing long after they were last seen and are often the missing persons cases that remain dormant or to get ignored because the person's lifestyle makes the reports seem less credible. Also, these are the files that are most likely to turn up as homicide files at a later date, often with few leads and no evidence.

For this reason, the concept of proactive registration of these individuals is a 'best practice'. High risk persons are voluntarily registered and monitored by Project KARE. Participation makes it much less likely that these individuals become forgotten or considered

“less-alive”.<sup>1</sup> Also, it reduces the chances that victims of predatory homicides remain unidentified due to a lack of DNA, dental, or medical records. This proactive approach allows for the rapid identification of victims, thereby narrowing the timeline of the investigation of a homicide, high risk missing person complaint, or the investigation of a suspicious person complaint, and thus increasing the likelihood of success. In addition to the identification of high risk persons, the voluntary registration of these individuals permits the monitoring of clients while they are active on the streets. Although the monitoring of the high risk persons does not act as a form of protection, it assists in locating these people for a variety of enforcement and non-enforcement related matters, including occasions when they may go missing.

Investigators obtain an electronic digital image of the participant. Tattoos, jewelry, and scars are photographed with the permission of the individual and depending on the location of the marking. Information is requested from the individual about the identity of their next of kin or whom they would like contacted if something were to happen to them. The high risk persons are asked to provide several scalp hairs with attached roots to be used for DNA profiling. Hair samples are selected because they are the least intrusive practice of collecting DNA. This is also the safest way of preventing the spread of infectious diseases from the high risk persons to Project KARE investigators.

All high risk persons are advised that the information is being collected for identification purposes only in the event of their death or suspicious disappearance. Their participation is completely voluntary, including providing a DNA sample. The sample is retained by Project

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Steven A. Egger (2002) stated that “the victims of serial killers, viewed when alive as part of a devalued stratum of humanity, become ‘less-dead’ (since for many they were ‘less-alive’ before their death and now become the ‘never-were’), and their demise is experienced as the elimination of sores or blemishes cleansed by those who dare to wash away these undesirable elements” (2002: 80).

KARE and is intended to be used only if necessary to identify human remains or assist in missing person files. The DNA sample will not be used for any other purpose and will not be released to another agency for any other purpose without the person's consent or unless Project KARE is compelled to do so by a lawful judicial order. The personal information provided to Project KARE members may be used to assist in "Missing Persons" investigations and may be entered in any future National Data Banks, such as a "Missing Persons Index."

Once the individual has been registered, she or he is entered onto Project KARE's dataset and a file is created to monitor and update all contacts, work areas, receipt of new information, current addresses, and other information that would assist Project KARE in identifying or locating them at a later date if they were reported missing or found deceased. As of April 2007, Project KARE has registered over 500 High Risk Persons. Project KARE investigators have regular contact with the Edmonton Police Service Missing Persons Unit, as well as all other Alberta police agencies who investigate missing persons cases on a regular basis. When a missing person, who meets the mandate of Project KARE is reported missing, Project KARE are advised by this Missing Persons Unit. Project KARE takes a proactive approach and completes an immediate fan-out to all social agencies registered with them. Although Project KARE does not take over the file, they are active in the high risk missing persons investigation in attempting to locate the individual.

This intelligence-based practice developed into a humanitarian approach to deal with potential missing persons who live a high risk lifestyle to ensure that they are reported missing quickly to allow for an investigation to begin. It is the Pro Active Team investigator's role to establish a professional relationship and communication with all of the High Risk Persons operating on the streets in downtown Edmonton. To date, over 90% of the High Risk Persons

approached have voluntarily provided their information. Project KARE enjoys this high rate of cooperation because the Pro Active Team is not seen as an enforcement unit. The individuals who register with the Pro Active Team are afforded the opportunity to play an active part in the investigation, and it is agreed that their information will be carefully guarded and not used for enforcement purposes. Because the Pro Active Team was designed to gather intelligence to assist in identifying predatory offenders, it has blossomed into a successful and unique humanitarian and intelligence unit.

Furthermore, the team provides high risk persons, other law enforcement, and social agencies with a 24 hour contact number for Project KARE investigators in order to establish and maintain constant communication. The team has, on many occasions, located high risk missing persons and assisted these individuals in changing or altering their current lifestyle by referring them to the appropriate agency for assistance. As a result of Project KARE investigators' familiarization with social agencies and their services, they are able to direct the high risk person to the specific social agency that can best assist them. It is of utmost importance that investigators maintain contact with social agencies and their current staff members to assist in expediting the necessary follow-up. The success of this concept has encouraged expansion to other Alberta jurisdictions, such as Grand Prairie, Ft. McMurray, Red Deer, and potentially Calgary.

### **Initial Information**

Given the recognized gaps in the collection of information from the missing persons coding sheet discussed in Chapter 2, it became crucial from a research and practical perspective to at least re-examine the information that police or other collection personnel would acquire to begin the search for a missing person. Factors, such as the history, age, weather at time reported

missing, and health, contribute to the decision making process that leads to the risk assessment process.

Table 3.1 represents the categories of missing person attributes that result from the bare minimum basic questions that should be asked at the time a missing person file is created. There are many more investigative questions and steps that should occur at the time of the initial report; however, these are the very basic questions that would and should be asked in order to start an investigation into a missing persons case. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but rather a “minimum data collection form”. All police agencies are mandated by policy to capture the following basic questions at the time the report is made or to subsequently query various sources of information, such as CPIC and motor vehicle branch databases to acquire the information.

**Table 3.1: Important Characteristics Obtained During the Filing of a Missing Persons Report**

<b>Variable</b>
Year of File
Police File Number
Jurisdiction
Gender
Age
Hair Colour
Height (cm)
Height (inches)
Weight (kg)
Weight (lbs)
Tattoos
Race
Ethnic Appearance
Place Last Seen
Probable Cause of Having Gone Missing (IE medical issues, evidence at scene, mental issues etc.)
Last Seen Source (Name, address and telephone of the person reporting)
Has the file been forwarded to CPIC?
Description of Clothing (on form, but not yes/no question)
Home address
Are there any medical records available/on file
Are there any dental records available/on file
Did the missing person have a driver's license (not necessarily asked, but queried post-reporting)
Did the missing person have a criminal record (not necessarily asked, but queried post-reporting)

## **Investigations**

In Alberta, the larger police agencies have dedicated teams or individuals that coordinate and investigate missing persons files. The number of human resources varies from one to five. As the investigation of these files is the responsibility of the police force of jurisdiction, it is at the discretion of the applicable department to allocate the amount of resources for these files. All Alberta police agencies policies require that once a missing persons file is created, the file must be added to CPIC. The addition of the file to CPIC and the amount of information that was added in relation to the file varied widely until the creation of the Alberta Missing Persons and

Unidentified Human Remains (AMPUHR) initiative. Previously 1.9% of files (6) were not added to CPIC amongst the police agencies in Alberta, and 13.5% (42) of files were incomplete (personal communication-research team, 2007).

At times, the data entered into CPIC was insufficient. However, now all Alberta police agencies and the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner are participating in the AMPUHR initiative. This initiative is the working model of this major paper and has allowed for the creation of a Provincial database and website to house all cases of missing persons and unidentified human remains in Alberta in this centralized location. It has allowed for another form of quality assurance to all police agencies to ensure that a file classified as a missing persons file is added to the AMPUHR database, CPIC, and the provincial website. It also allows for the research form to be properly completed which will assist the police force of jurisdiction in their investigation.

Alberta police agencies and the Chief Medical Examiner's office are some of the leaders in this area. By having all Alberta police agencies participate in this initiative since the commencement of this major paper, a designated team within Project KARE assists each police department with the accuracy of the data and maintenance of a public website. This is one of the described benefits of a provincially dedicated team. This centralized model concept provides quality assurance to not only the minimum required data as directed in all Alberta police agencies policies and procedures, but also a much larger and consistent entry of data that can be of great assistance in locating missing persons and allow future research to identify trends that could lead to the proper allocation of scarce resources. With the initiation of recent research on uncleared missing persons cases in Alberta and British Columbia, a centralized database has been created that will lead to a western Canadian solution. This solution is hopefully only the

first step in implementing a national database, website, and eventually a national missing persons program.

Since the majority of persons reported missing return soon after their disappearance, the efforts of the investigation applied against a person who is missing are often considered unnecessary. One of the most important considerations for the police when investigating missing person's files is to ensure that opportunities to gather time sensitive evidence that can be later used in criminal procedures is not overlooked. The investigator's decision making process itself is not complex once it is determined that a person is missing, especially if the case involves a missing child or if foul play is suspected. There are ample qualified detachment personnel, detectives, and serious crime investigators who would implement a proven investigational protocol referred to as major case management. This investigational process ensures a comprehensive investigation of individuals who are reported missing. This includes the file being added to another national database, called Violent Criminal Linkage Analysis System or ViCLAS. This national database has been in existence for years and is utilized by all police agencies in Canada. It is legislated in some Provinces that cases suspected of foul play, including missing persons, be added to the database. This tool is excellent for linking cases. It allows investigators to enter data in a standardized fashion into a 'one bucket' data base which has over 300,000 cases. The computer then points to linkages of crimes committed by the same offender. However, since only a small number of missing persons cases involve suspected foul play, the majority of cases are not added to this database.

What would occur in an investigation where the missing person is not regarded as 'at risk' or foul play is not suspected is presently quite different from police agency to police agency. For the most part, all agencies would open a file, place the file on CPIC, and efforts

would be made to locate the person. The effort in locating the person varies depending on each individual case, but some effort will be made.

## **Communication**

Once an investigation is initiated by the police force of jurisdiction, the next step is to ensure communication and the sharing of the vital information required to locate the person and perhaps identify human remains found. Presently, in Alberta, there are few problems with the sharing of information between the Medical Examiner's office and police. Existing legislation allows for this to occur, as police are considered investigators for the medical examiner when it comes to sudden death investigations where foul play is not suspected. However, a gap exists in the formal mechanisms to share vital information with other agencies, such as health care, medical practitioners, and social agencies. The established contacts and protocols that exist within Project KARE and the AMPUHR have functioned adequately thus far; however, these sharing practices have not been formalized through legislation.

## **Sharing Information with Other Agencies**

Communication is critical to the investigation of missing persons cases. This communication must occur within the original police force and extend to other agencies. Communication of all of the gathered and relevant investigational material must be shared to maximize the probability that a person will be found. Project KARE made initial contact with all agencies involved with High Risk Persons in Alberta, and created a fan-out system to facilitate the distribution of information on missing persons and other investigational requirements very quickly. The relationship developed in this area has increased the success of locating reported and non-reported missing persons. The fan-out is currently distributed to 101 law enforcement and 112 social agency contacts and non-governmental organizations. By including the AMPUHR

initiative in the development of this system, communication is extended to all police agencies within Alberta since all participate in and have access to this tool.

One of the most crucial components of a police response to any issue is the ability for all law enforcement agencies to have the ability to share information in a timely and accurate fashion. The sharing of information in a multi jurisdictional and timely fashion within formal means is a necessity. In Alberta, like the rest of Canada, CPIC provides this ability to a limited capacity. However, what is apparent is that the present components and protocols within CPIC are not sufficient to adequately search, match, and link missing persons cases with unidentified human remain cases. There are presently both technical and procedural obstacles that preclude this success within the present structure of CPIC. One technical example is presently no photographs of tattoos, scars or subjects can be added to CPIC. This is a large gap in the present data base as “a picture is worth a thousand words”. However, within Alberta and some other jurisdictions in Canada, efforts are underway to narrow that gap, and solutions have been created to ensure a “one bucket” concept for the centralization of all missing person and unidentified human remain files. The efforts created to minimize this gap are underway within the working group formed under the CACP resolution #06-2008 as well as progress in the creation of a western Canadian missing person and unidentified human remains file data base.

One option being explored is to modify, enhance, and supplement the use of CPIC, while enforcing existing and/or creating new protocols within CPIC to ensure the requirements of uncleared missing person investigations are met. Efforts are currently being made to determine the feasibility of adding new fields to CPIC that will enable additional information to be tracked searched through the use of analytical tools, such as the ViCLAS-based RapidID. However, the missing person data in CPIC is presently being tracked using a limited number of fields. In many instances, the information contained in free-text comments fields is limited, incomplete, and incorrect

or is entirely missing. Likewise, information, such as eye and hair colour, is also often missing. In terms of ancestry or ethnic affiliation, CPIC has two options – White and Non-white. This is obviously of limited use when it comes to locating missing persons or identifying human remains. In addition, the process for having changes considered for approval and implementation are extremely time-consuming (personal communication, Beckett, 2010). The modified or enhanced CPIC protocols could be enforced by an independent missing person unit or a Proactive Team unit. The unit quality assurances would ensure compliance within the new system.

There are several advantages of using a database, such as the one developed at Project KARE, when compared to utilizing a system, such as CPIC, which has been in use for many years. The Project KARE AMPUHR database was created using analytical software named iBase which was developed by the company i2. This database is comprised of missing persons records added through either automatic or manual processes. These database records are either based on information gleaned directly from missing persons and/or human remains files or are based on information housed in CPIC itself. The advantage of including records based directly on files is that the information is most often a great deal more rich than the information housed in CPIC, thereby potentially providing for a greater number of access points when conducting a parameterized search (personal communication, Beckett, 2010).

In terms of searching capabilities, one can conduct ad hoc parameterized queries against fields contained in the database by way of items, such as hair and eye colour, gender, height, weight, and the date the missing person was last seen. One can also perform keyword searches in the database in an effort to locate highly specific information, such as evidence of a medical procedure having been performed on a given person prior to their having gone missing or their remains having been located. In addition, one can also perform a query that contains a scored matching function whereby the researcher receives a list of results ranked in order with a score based on the weighting assigned in the initial query. All of the searching abilities are performed on a local level by the

analyst. Although one can look missing persons information up in CPIC using a search tool, such as RapidID, the information must often be retrieved by a specialized few individuals who have access to it. The combination of RapidID and CPIC also has a very limited analytical function. Changes or enhancements to either RapidID or CPIC must go through a long change management process, if they are made at all. Conversely, the localized Project KARE AMPUHR database can be enhanced through the addition of new fields or data with very little effort or approval process.

Another advantage that the KARE database has over CPIC is the control of the data itself. If information in a given record is proven to be inaccurate, it can be edited with a few keystrokes. CPIC data needs to be edited by the agency that submitted it in the first instance. Although CPIC is centralized, the ownership of the data is not.

Analysts at Project KARE have done their best to gather missing person data from Alberta, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut. In addition, they have gathered open-source information from Manitoba and Saskatchewan missing person websites and have compiled them into a single database to facilitate the “one bucket” concept. The data from missing persons files in B.C. and the Yukon is also available for a western Canadian database. It is a very real possibility that an individual who resides in one province actually goes missing in another. The efforts of Project KARE analysts are meant to alleviate this search limitation and enable cross-border researching of data in a single local database. The advantage of having a database that covers the Northwest Region of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and its partner law enforcement agencies is that enhancements can be made in very short order. Such is the case with the highly successful Ontario Provincial Police’s Project Resolve. Since the inception of Project Resolve’s database and publicly-viewable website, over 40 missing persons and human remains cases have been cleared through the use of locally-created database technology (personal communication, Beckett, 2010). Both Project RESOLVE and AMPUHR initiatives are measures that ensure an adequate response to missing persons in Alberta and Ontario for those agencies that participate in both projects.

Despite the need for improvements or alternatives to CPIC, the AMPUHR program is showing signs of success as investigators from RCMP units, municipal agencies, and the Medical Examiner's office, when attempting to identifying a body, can contact AMPUHR to request "AMPUHR Queries". A reporting template has been developed to provide investigators with the results of these queries and suggested avenues of investigation. One such success story from this initiative was the resolution of a 2006 found human remains case in which a body from Abbotsford, British Columbia was linked to a St. Albert, Alberta missing persons investigation by the fact that the missing man had a cranial shunt. The link led to further investigation and resulted in a confirmation of identity, giving a grieving family some degree of closure. The lead investigator stated that the remains "would likely have remained unidentified without the assistance of Project KARE". This case re-affirmed the need for multi-jurisdictional and multi-provincial searches with respect to linking missing persons and unidentified human remains cases. Since the commencement of the research for this major paper, the efforts created to minimize the gaps within CPIC are underway within the working group formed under the CACP resolution #06-2008. It is encouraging that these gaps may be adequately filled in the future; however, the need for a solution still exists until the gaps are closed.

## **Partnerships Outside Alberta**

With the hopes of creating a provincial, regional, and national missing persons and unidentified human remains database, Project KARE has entered into a pilot project with R.C.M.P."E" Division's Major Crimes Unit and the BC Police Missing Persons Centre. Early success of this pilot project emphasized the benefits of expansion into other jurisdictions. Currently, all police agencies in Alberta, British Columbia, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut have provided the information necessary for this missing persons initiative. Discussions with

police, partners, and stakeholders in Saskatchewan and Manitoba were positive, and it is anticipated that there will be a western Canadian or regional program and database, and hopefully a national program. Members of the Project KARE team have been invited and reside on the national missing persons initiative that would provide a national perspective, as discussed earlier in this paper. The benefit of this approach is that the partnerships will be inclusive of all police agencies which would move towards a national program that would increase the success of locating missing persons.

### **Sharing Information with the Public**

Of the eleven police agencies in Alberta, currently all but one has a dedicated website. The agencies which have missing persons have them listed, but not necessarily in a dedicated area on the website. Since the creation of Project KARE, and now the AMPUHR initiative, 100% of all police departments within Alberta participate in allowing the public to view all missing persons cases in a dedicated website, format, and with links to all police agencies in Alberta. The website located at ([www.albertamissingperson.ca](http://www.albertamissingperson.ca)) is expanding to include all missing persons and unidentified human remain cases. Under the purview of the Chief Medical Examiner, Alberta's medical examiners have agreed to participate in the AMPUHR initiative, ensuring that all unidentified human remains and missing persons file will eventually be on one dataset and website. Websites of this nature allow the public to actively participate in the location of missing persons, while providing police with "extra resources" in the form of public participation. This is a recommendation that is being pursued at the national level by the Canadian Association Chiefs of Police.

In February 2008, the AMPUHR website was launched. In addition to the main Project KARE website ([www.kare.ca](http://www.kare.ca)) launched in 2004, this website serves as another example of

Alberta police and other government agencies' commitment in providing a collaborative, consistent, and leading edge approach in dealing with all missing person cases, while serving the citizens of Alberta. This provides some reassurance to families of missing persons that their loved ones have not been forgotten by the police. With this website, the public and police can view and search through over 170 missing persons and unidentified human remains profiles containing photos and information obtained from RCMP and municipal agency files. This website is regularly updated to ensure recent and accurate information with new profiles added daily. Once the backlog of cases has been added, all missing persons who have been missing for at least six months are added to the website. There are always exceptions to be made for exigent circumstances. The choice of the addition of missing persons after six months is consistent with practices of other western provinces and the research indicating that within six months of going missing, 96% of people reported missing return home or are located.

This website has already led to the identification of one person who had been reported missing from Alberta. In August 2008, a member of the public living in a western Province recognized a man living in her neighborhood from a profile that she had seen on the AMPUHR website. The information was provided to police and led to a positive identification. Although the man in question preferred to remain estranged from his family, police, with help from a member of the public and the AMPUHR website, were able to assure the family that their loved-one was alive and well.

The website also allows for questions and comments from the public to be forwarded to members of Project KARE. Every inquiry is responded to in a timely manner. Incoming messages range from providing updated information about missing persons to asking how to go about reporting a missing person. Between February 8 2008 and February 9 2009, the site

received nearly 30,000 visits from people from all across Canada and from nine other countries around the world (Beckett, 2008). The website also has links to other police agencies and other missing persons websites. This has proven to be not only an investigational tool, but also a great public relations move by Project KARE. Discussions are underway to link or integrate this website with those existing in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. It is hoped that this will evolve into the implementation of a national website that will cover all missing person cases in Canada.

## **Summary**

The initiatives discussed in this major paper being utilized and developed thus far are the foundation for further discussion in the final chapter of this major paper. The use of a single definition of a missing person, consistent policies and procedures for reporting, risk assessment tools, detailed intake forms, communication strategies, sharing of information both internally amongst police and coroners, the fan out system, and partnerships and implementation of promising practices being utilized within the police and medical examiner community in Alberta are all strengths that are attributed to the progress made in Alberta.

## **CHAPTER 4: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

I am acutely aware of the problem of uncleared missing persons cases in Alberta and Canada. I was the Officer in Charge of the RCMP Serious Crimes Branch in Alberta and the creator of a newly established unit to deal with uncleared missing persons cases in Alberta. As indicated in the introduction to this major paper, I also participate on a federal, provincial, and territorial working group on missing and murdered women, as well as a participant on the CACP national missing persons initiative. As well, I was a contributor and member on a national working group regarding the examination of a national missing persons DNA index. I am providing this information to acknowledge that I am acutely aware that there are challenges with uncleared missing persons cases as they presently exist. These challenges include inconsistent reporting, a non-relational national database, lack of missing persons programs, lack of data and inaccurate reporting, and, at times, the struggle for the police to have the ability to provide an efficient and effective response to these cases. These struggles are not unique to Alberta, but are challenges throughout Canada.

What is keenly important and verified from the examination provided throughout this major paper is that positive efforts are afoot to respond to these challenges. These efforts, although not well known to the public, are now well established, growing in efficiency and effectiveness, and are championed across Alberta and the rest of Canada. In this regard, we have initiatives in Alberta, such as Project KARE and the Alberta Missing Persons and Unidentified Human Remains initiative, that have addressed and continue to address the issues identified in this major paper. Many of the challenges discovered in this research are resolved or being resolved as this paper is being crafted. Moreover, there are similar efforts being undertaken across the country to address these concerns.

The following recommendations are procedures that are already occurring on some level within Alberta. These recommendations include the implementation of some practices that should be mandatory for all police agencies across this country, as well as some steps that should be optional for those agencies that have very few uncleared missing persons cases. Regardless of whether these recommendations become compulsory, all recommendations within this major paper should be available or accessible by all police agencies in Canada. It is of critical importance to take steps to improve the services provided by the police in regard to the issue of missing persons. As Newiss (1999) stated, the investigation of missing persons cases is greatly related to the overall image of the police.

The identification of those missing persons who have fallen victim to serious crime is vital to the maintenance of a positive police image. In cases where the police have delayed their response to a missing person (who has later been discovered to have been the victim of a serious offender) the media have been quick to accuse the police of inaction and ineffectiveness. (Newiss, 1999:8).

## **A Unified Definition of a Missing Person**

The definition of a missing person needs to be standardized for all police services in Alberta and Canada and, where applicable and feasible, be expanded to include the concepts of the Project KARE's Pro Active Team. The lack of a standardized missing person definition leads to a broad and varied interpretation of who 'is actually missing'. Until a person is declared missing as per the definition, little or no effort is typically made to locate that person. As indicated above, the standardization of all policies and procedures may not be suitable for all Alberta police agencies. An example is the Pro Active Team approach would not be feasible or suitable to the majority of police agencies in the province as they have a very small number of missing persons. However, there are certain aspects of the nuances of missing persons investigations that standardization would be beneficial to all, regardless of the variety of

challenges for different police agencies. Given this, standardization of a common definition would be beneficial to all Alberta police agencies and is strongly recommended.

One definition, which is simple and applicable, stated:

Anyone whose whereabouts is unknown whatever the circumstances of disappearance. They will be considered missing until located and their well-being or otherwise is established. There will be circumstances where a lost person is missing but police involvement may not be required, ie, tracing a long lost relative. Appropriate action may be a referral to other relevant agencies that may provide assistance... the investigation into a missing person begins at the point of first notification to the police (Association of Chief Police Officers, 2005: 8).

This definition may appear too simplistic in explaining what constitutes a missing person to police since there are many variations of such calls for service. However, it is this simplicity that allows for clarity and accuracy when a missing person file is to be initiated by police.

Determining which resources, procedures, and investigational direction should be employed in locating a missing person who fits the above noted described definition is where a consistent approach across all Alberta police forces is recommended. This would allow for appropriate action in all cases and the clients the police serve would have little to no confusion as to what is being done regarding their complaint.

The examination of all Alberta police services policies and definitions of missing persons is the first important step as this is what initiates the policies, procedures, and investigational steps taken once a person is classified as missing. The designation is critical as it contributes to the success in locating a missing person. The understanding of what constitutes a missing person lies within the definition documented in the police forces' policies and procedures or by the investigator's interpretation of 'missing'. Therefore, a crucial aspect in these investigations is to define what a missing person is to each police jurisdiction within Alberta's police community.

There is one limitation in the aforementioned definition from the ACPO. The definition should include an element related to how an investigation could commence even before the

notification to police. Although there may be a view that the expenditure of resources to proactively learn of missing persons is not the role of police, the success of Project KARE established the proactive approach as a “promising practice” and, as such, serves as the rationale for this recommended modification to the existing definition. In effect, the recommendation of adopting the ACPO (2005) definition necessitates the inclusion of the following amendment: “the investigation into a missing person begins at the point of first notification to *or by* the police”. This expansion of the definition of a missing person, coupled with the Pro Active Team approach in Project KARE, is considered a promising practice and has been shared across various locations in North America and England.

### **Minimum Investigational Steps**

Although a very difficult task, the standardization of all policies and procedures for police agencies would be most beneficial as it would ensure consistency of reporting, risk assessment, data collection, and investigational steps pursued throughout the province. As pointed out throughout this major paper, there are gaps and there are many initiatives being implemented to narrow these gaps in Alberta.

Again, five police agencies within Alberta had no missing persons on file at the commencement of the research for this major paper. They received so few missing persons files that it would likely not be prudent for these departments to adopt all of the suggested recommendations in this major paper or what is proposed in the ‘recommended business process’. Nor would it be prudent or significant to consider the statistics generated from the research as the number of cases of all “other” police agencies was so minimal that they produced no significant data. The “other” category used in this study was represented by only three agencies which provided only 11 (3.5 per cent) of the 312 missing persons cases. However, from

a practical policing perspective, a potential solution is the adaptation of standardized policies and applicable procedures where certain best practices exist to ensure that police organizations are prepared to handle missing person occurrences when or if they occur. Most of the recommended and prudent steps have already been adopted by all Alberta police agencies through their participation in the Alberta Missing Persons and Unidentified Human Remains (AMPUHR) initiative. The benefit to adopting minimal investigative steps is that the likelihood of locating missing persons or matching unidentified human remains with open missing persons cases increases.

### **A Standardized Risk Assessment and Data Collection Tool**

Standardized initial reporting procedures and exploration of standardized risk assessment tools would greatly enhance the success of the investigation of missing person cases. It is recommended that, like the POIPAT, this proposed tool should be subjected to future academic research for validity. The validity would be based upon further research of missing person files tested against the tool. As indicated above, the Edmonton Police Service has recently researched similar models and has implemented a risk assessment tool within their missing persons unit's policies. It has been proposed that the existing partnership with Project KARE, and now the Alberta Missing Persons and Unidentified Human Remains initiative, be expanded. However, it is important to keep in mind that it currently has limited capacity. This existing partnership can act as a template for the foundation of further integration of all police services in the province of Alberta where applicable, and the one intake form can be utilized by all services.

The POIPAT was created as a result of the hundreds of Persons of Interests (POIs) in the homicide investigations under the Project KARE mandate. Although part of a team effort within Project KARE, then Staff Sergeant Larry Wilson, was the founder of the idea. Wilson created a

rudimentary POIPAT during his role as the lead analyst in the Bernardo homicide file in the 1990's in Ontario (Wilson, 2004). With the huge volume of POIs and limited human resources, it was imperative that a risk management tool be utilized. This tool, the POIPAT, would be used to prioritize POIs based on their likelihood of being the person responsible for the crime(s). This same concept would be applied to a risk management tool for investigators when a person is deemed missing. This risk assessment tool for missing persons would be used to prioritize investigational resources to locate missing persons, regardless of the other variables present, such as their occupation, income, gender, age, ethnic background, or sexual orientation.

Establishing the priority that should be placed on subjects who have been identified as missing is a very subjective process, but it is extremely important to ensure the most effective and efficient use of human, technical, and financial resources. As is the case with the POIPAT in its use as an objective means of assessment of priority level, a new missing persons risk assessment tool should not be considered infallible until its validity is properly assessed. It would be designed to include factors that lower the risks in the decision making process of missing persons files in the hope of decreasing the number of missing persons files that remain uncleared.

Like the POIPAT, a series of questions relevant to the investigation would be asked. The missing persons priority assessment tool would be premised on the idea that when a missing person is identified, there are questions that an investigator would ask to determine the likelihood that this particular subject will remain missing. Such questions might involve the subject's behavior, suicidal tendencies, having a history of going missing, reasons for going missing, and whether the person was likely the victim of a crime.

Again, the same concept and principles can apply to a missing persons risk management tool for investigators. The objective would be to develop a tool or build upon existing tools to

help alleviate the investigator and his superiors from the “guess work” of what urgency level should be placed on any given missing person file. This would ensure consistency amongst police agencies, increase the likelihood of success in locating missing persons, and enhance the public’s understanding of what steps are being implemented in finding their loved ones. As indicated in the following quotation from Tarling and Burrows, it may not be an easy task, but it is a task worth pursuing:

Another crucial difficulty in developing a statistical risk prediction instrument for missing persons is that only a very small proportion of those individuals who are reported missing come to any harm. Evidence from the representative sample of 1,008 cases revealed that 96% returned safe and well, only 4% at most did not. With such a small ratio (known technically as the base rate), the development of an accurate or useful prediction instrument is notoriously difficult, as one is attempting to predict ‘rare’ events (2003: 26).

### **Proactive and/or Missing Persons Teams**

In previous chapters and subsections, an accounting of the Proactive Team Unit used in Alberta was provided. This unit is considered a promising practice as it allows police to register high risk persons who are most likely to go missing for extended periods of time. It is an improvement on the traditional methodology of waiting until someone from the family reports these individuals missing. As was the case in one file within Project KARE, it was over one year before a missing person was reported by the family. This kind of time lapse greatly reduces the likelihood of locating an individual. The access to a missing person Proactive Team concept or, at the very least, access to a dedicated missing person team or dedicated individual within the province, region, or country would ensure the consistent use of leading edge investigational tools and would diminish confusion in reporting. These dedicated teams would be in a position to adopt new techniques as they are developed. This same team would be responsible for public education on the matter of missing persons within the assigned provinces along with a victim

service employee. One important and obvious educational use would be to dispel the fallacy that there is a need to wait 24 hours before reporting someone missing.

## **Victim and Family Services**

A proactive team or a designated missing persons unit would also include a victim services person and an Aboriginal culturally-sensitive component. The dedicated use of victim services or a family liaison team would be a crucial aspect of a missing person program and would ensure that a 'human side' of the investigation is applied. The addition of Aboriginal officers, who deal with this specific cultural group, is also a key component. An Aboriginal officer is culturally sensitive, has an ethnic advantage of trust with Aboriginal persons and many times speaks the same language. Project KARE has a Victim Services Unit (VSU) that provides emotional and other support through regular contact with victims. With the addition of the AMPUHR Unit, families of those on a website are contacted by the VSU. Within Project KARE, Aboriginal officers have helped ease the registration of and communication with apprehensive Aboriginal people.

The recommended victim services would provide contact that would include case updates, referrals to appropriate agencies, emotional support, and help filling out forms related to financial benefits, consent for release of information, DNA consent forms, and victim impact statements. In cases where a trial occurs, the victims will be provided with court accompaniment and court preparation. The role of victim services would assist the investigators by providing continued emotional support to victims and their families, giving the investigators more time to pursue investigation-related matters.

## **Public Website**

The website established in Alberta is an excellent example of a resource tool for public participation that should expand across the country. The “fan out system” established in Alberta could be expanded as well. This would ensure instant assistance from key agencies and departments, as well as the public at large. The benefits include many individuals keeping an eye out for the missing persons versus only a few. The benefits of this website could be adopted nationally in the form of a multiple listing service website similar to “MLS Realty”. This could serve as a template with which the public is already familiar, as well as encouraging the participation by the public in a ‘one stop shopping’ concept. Success of this format is already proven by the finding of missing persons by the public in all provinces that have such a website. A potential negative impact of such a website is that police agencies may not have the ability to explore all leads provided by the public in a timely fashion should dedicated resources not be available. However, this potential negative effect is far outweighed by the positive effect of national and public access.

## **Legislative Changes**

Legislative changes in the area of sharing of information amongst government agencies would be required in a formal process to ensure timely and accurate information is available to police. Eventually, the creation of a provincial and a national missing persons program should, at a minimum, include this type of legislation changes that would allow for easy and immediate information sharing. Presently, police struggle to obtain information regarding persons who have been reported missing because the *Privacy and Freedom of Information Acts* across Canada prohibit or limit the sharing of information without judicial authorization. Without the police believing an offence has been committed, the acquisition of judicial authorization to obtain

critical information is almost non-existent. This is problematic as information held in other institutions may contain the piece of evidence required to locate a missing person. There is provincial legislation in Saskatchewan, Bill No. 50, *An Act respecting Missing Persons and Persons Presumed to be Dead*, repealing *The Absentee Act* passed in spring 2009. This *Act* provides an example of legislation that is required for police to acquire crucial personal information to increase the likelihood of locating missing persons. The Act allows the sharing of crucial information such as the last time perhaps a missing person last accessed say health care services. This information allows police to create a time line and an investigational picture as to the movements of the person thus increasing there likelihood of locating the person. More expedient and formal legislated access to crucial information would likely lead to more leads being created or concluded resulting in a greater likelihood of a successful investigation.

### **Movement Towards a Single National Database**

As recommended throughout this major paper, there is an immediate need for a common database accessible by police, medical examiners, and coroners that can be searched, has linkage capabilities, and has accurate, up-to-date data. Without such a database, there will be silos of information and expertise throughout the country in the form of individual units or programs. A single database would allow for investigational agencies and their partners, such as the medical examiners/coroners, from across the country to immediately access all missing persons and unidentified human remains files. This would create a ‘one bucket approach’ for all information and it would increase the likelihood of matching missing persons files with unidentified human remain files. Given the mobility of many Canadians, this would also contribute to increasing the likelihood of locating missing persons across Canada. Finally, the creation of a national missing person index is necessary in order to increase the number of successfully concluded missing

person and unidentified human remains cases so the results can be shared with the loved ones of those who are missing and are deceased.

### **Missing Person DNA Index**

Another recommendation and tool for police investigators would be the creation of a missing person index within the existing national DNA databank. As discussed above, the Project KARE Proactive Team has a current foundation for such a database. This collection of DNA from high risk persons has now expanded to many more Alberta jurisdictions and has included other areas of high risk persons, not just sex trade workers. On a national level, discussions took place relating to the creation of a DNA Missing Persons Index in 2005. These consultations were subsequent to previous federal-provincial-territorial ministerial discussions intended to determine whether there was a need for a system that would be used to identify anonymous human remains (Public Safety Canada, 2005).

The Missing Persons Index Design Team (2007) established that a DNA-based Missing Persons Index (MPI) would be particularly useful in cases where traditional means of identification (e.g., fingerprints, dental records) cannot be used. The creation of a nationwide MPI would be a major humanitarian victory as it would provide some closure for the families of missing persons by confirming whether identified human remains were those of a missing person. Additionally, it would be of assistance in mass disasters, plane crashes, and in police and coroners' investigations where the identity of the deceased must be established. The DNA MPI being recommended here would be comprised of a database containing the DNA profiles of missing persons in order to permit the identification of anonymous human remains. Matches could be sought between DNA profiles derived from unidentified human remains and DNA profiles voluntarily submitted by the blood relatives of missing persons or with DNA profiles

derived from bodily substances provided by a biological relative of a missing person or from personal items belonging to missing persons (Missing Persons Index Design Team, 2007).

## **Final Thoughts**

Further research is required to ensure that accurate numbers of the uncleared missing persons and unidentified human remains cases are on record. This type of research requires duplication across the country to accurately reveal the number of those who are truly missing. Further research should be initiated to discover why the classification of the reason for going missing is 'unknown' for so many uncleared cases of missing persons. Finally, the topic that is at the forefront of Canadian discussion is the number of Aboriginal women who are missing in Canada. Alberta is no exception. These issues are areas worthy of further academic research.

Again, with the above in mind, the focus of this major paper was the analysis of uncleared missing persons cases and police practices in Alberta. This major paper described the nature and extent of uncleared missing persons cases in Alberta centering on the issue of how police respond to missing persons cases in Alberta. By examining these topics, a series of recommendations have been put forward in an attempt to point police toward improving missing persons investigations so that they operate in an efficient, effective, and equitable manner. Further suggestions have been provided for the direction of additional research, as well as ideas to improve existing research and protocols for missing persons and police responses. All of this will be valuable to police across the country to develop common policies and procedures. The ultimate intention of this work is to encourage the formation of a national missing persons program.

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