



1st International Conference on Missing Children and Adults: 'Working across Borders'

## Discussant: Politics and Geographies of Missing People

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## Key message across both papers

- **Disjoint between demands of families and bureaucratic processes**
  - Families - to know what happened/ find them
  - Police
    - To collect information
    - Forms of categorization
    - Masking specificity/ complexity
- **Process prioritized over people**
- **Family may conduct own search in response**
- **Response communicates the person is prioritized**
- **Bulk of everyday missing persons cases complicated by ambiguous loss**

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## Working with Families of Missing

### 1) Family involvement in search

- Not passive victims but majority actively search
- Police need to *involve* families in search (if appropriate).

### 2) Need to communicate the person is prioritized over process

- Apparent in way good relationships described
- *How families expect the police to behave*
- Conduct own search/ campaigning.

### Risks for tiered response to 'missing' and 'absent'?

- May be experienced as bureaucratic definition
- Challenges family's character witness
- How repeat absent/ missing explored with families

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## Working with People Reported Missing

### Understanding Missing

- Missing scenarios
- Majority not at risk of harm but...
- Vulnerability – in crisis

### 1) Lessons for search

- Seeking time out/ escape
- Familiarity/ safety but hiding/ disguising
- Asking additional questions
- Engaging additional partners

### 2) Lessons for return

- May wish but fear to return
- Fear of being 'in trouble with' the police
- Dangers of bureaucratic 'safe and well' response
- Asking what happened? – opportunity to say where been/ why left?

### Preventing repeat absent/ missing

- Reduced opportunities if not responding to 'absent'?
- Advice and support on return whether 'absent' or 'missing'?

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