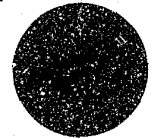


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Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children in America

**First Report:
Numbers and Characteristics
National Incidence Studies**

OJJDP

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**First Report:
Numbers and Characteristics
National Incidence Studies**

May 1990

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FOREWORD

The release of the First Report from the National Incidence Studies, Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children in America, marks the beginning of a new era of better understanding of the extent and nature of these problems. For nearly a decade, the lack of accurate information on missing children in America has hampered the development of policies and allocation of resources.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention sponsored this seminal study of missing children by the University of New Hampshire in response to a congressional mandate of the Missing Children's Act. Through this and other research, the Office has come to recognize that the problem of missing children is not singular, nor is it wholly separated from the problems of delinquency with which the Office also deals. As is true of the latter, the incidence of missing children is composed of different social problems greatly stemming from the weakening of the American family.

Effectively preventing and dealing with the multifaceted problems of missing children requires accurate, reliable information. Therefore, the incidence studies focused on identifying risk factors, on the children's experiences, and on the responses of parents and police.

The release of these first findings culminates a 5-year effort. While these studies were carefully designed to answer as many questions as possible, we also recognize that the results may raise new questions for which answers will be needed. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is continuing to sponsor research to find the facts and to develop useful programs that will protect children and reduce delinquency.

The point to remember is that all of the numbers in this study represent real children, real lives, real needs. The value of our research is in helping such children to lead safe and normal lives.

Robert W. Sweet, Jr.
Administrator

This research was conducted for the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Cooperative Agreement #87-MC-CX-K069 under the direction of Gerald T. Hotaling and David Finkelhor, Co-Principal Investigators and Andrea J. Sedlak, Westat, Inc. Project Director.

Points of view or opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Throwaway Children in America
First Report: Numbers and Characteristics

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Estimates

	Estimated Number of Children in 1988
Family Abductions	
Broad Scope	354,100
Policy Focal	163,200
Non-Family Abductions	
Legal Definition Abductions	3,200-4,600
Stereotypical Kidnappings	200-300
Runaways	
Broad Scope	450,700
Policy Focal	133,500
Throwaways	
Broad Scope	127,100
Policy Focal	59,200
Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing	
Broad Scope	438,200
Policy Focal	139,100

• Because of definitional controversies, each problem is estimated according to two possible definitions (see pages viii-ix).

• These estimates should not be added or aggregated.

Major Conclusions

• What has in the past been called the missing children problem is in reality a set of at least five very different, distinct problems. Each of these problems needs to be researched, analyzed, and treated separately.

• Many of the children in at least four of these categories were not literally missing. Caretakers did know where they were.

The problem was in recovering them.

- Because of definitional controversies and confusion about the concept of missing children, public policy still needs to clarify the domain of this problem. Which children and which situations should be included, what do they have in common and what are they to be called?

- Family Abduction appeared to be a substantially larger problem than previously thought.

- The Runaway problem did not appear to be larger in 1988 than at the time of the last national survey in 1975.

- More than a fifth of the children who have previously been termed Runaways should actually be considered Throwaways.

- There were a large group of literally missing children who have not been adequately recognized by previous research and policy concerning missing children. These were children who were missing because they got lost, injured, or because they miscommunicated with caretakers about where they would be or when they would be home.

BACKGROUND

The National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Throwaway Children (NISMART) was undertaken in response to the mandate of the 1984 Missing Children Act. Its objective was to estimate the incidence of five categories of children, those who were:

- Abducted by family members
- Abducted by non-family members
- Runaways

- Throwaways
- Missing because they had gotten lost or injured, or for some other reason.

METHODOLOGY

NISMART collected data from six separate sources:

1) Household Survey. The centerpiece study was a telephone survey of 34,822 randomly selected households, which yielded interviews with 10,544 caretakers about the experiences of 20,505 children. The response rate for eligible households was 89 percent. The modern sophistication of such surveys allowed us to derive accurate national estimates, while compensating for households without phones and other nonparticipating households.

2) Juvenile Facilities Survey. This was a survey of residential facilities, such as boarding schools and group homes, to find out how many children had run away from these facilities, in addition to children who ran from households.

3) Returned Runaway Study. This interview study with children who had run away and returned home was primarily methodological. Its goal was to find out if children's accounts of episodes matched those of their parents.

4) Police Records Study. This was a study of police records in 83 law enforcement agencies in a national random sample of 21 counties to find out how many Non-Family Abductions were reported.

5) FBI Data Reanalysis. A reanalysis was conducted of 12 years of FBI homicide data to determine how many children were murdered in conjunction with possible abductions by strangers.

6) Community Professionals Study. This was a study of 735 agencies having contact with children in a national random sample of 29 counties to determine how many children known to these agencies were abandoned or thrown away.

DEFINITIONS

Serious definitional controversies surround each of the problems studied, which made it necessary to estimate the incidence of each according to at least two definitions. For example, in many States the crime of abduction can entail the coerced movement of a person as little as a few feet. Yet the public thinks of abduction in terms of notorious crimes like the Lindbergh or Adam Walsh kidnappings, where a child is taken a substantial distance, for a substantial period of time, or with the intent to keep or kill. Similarly, some State laws define parental abduction as an episode in which a parent takes a child or keeps a child for any length of time in violation of a custody decree. But the popular image of a parental abduction is of a parent who flees to another city or another country with a child or who hides the child incommunicado.

Thus, within each of the individual problems, we present incidence estimates according to at least two definitions: what we call, first, a "Broad Scope" and then a "Policy Focal" definition. "Broad Scope" generally defines the problem the way the affected families might define it. It includes both serious and also more minor episodes that may nonetheless be alarming to the participants. By contrast, "Policy Focal" generally defines the problem from the point of view of the police or other social

agencies. It is restricted to episodes of a more serious nature, where children are at risk and there is a need for immediate intervention. Policy Focal cases are a subset of Broad Scope ones.

We have also created two definitions of non-family abduction: the Legal Definition Abductions and Stereotypical Kidnappings. The Legal Definition Abduction corresponds to the crime of abduction as it is specified in the criminal law of many States and includes the short-term, coercive movement entailed in many rapes and assaults. Stereotypical Kidnappings, by contrast, reflect more closely the popular stereotype of a kidnapping, as a long-term, long-distance, or fatal episode.

These carefully crafted definitions were the result of a three-stage process, involving a panel of 34 experts, and a review of relevant legal statutes, law review articles, and prior studies.

FAMILY ABDUCTION

Family Abduction (Broad Scope) was defined (Figure FA-1) as situations where a family member 1) took a child in violation of a custody agreement or decree; or 2) in violation of a custody agreement or decree failed to return a child at the end of a legal or agreed-upon visit, with the child being away at least overnight.

A "family member," in addition to the usual meaning, included anyone with a romantic or sexual involvement with a parent. Moreover, "abductions" could be perpetrated by custodial as well as noncustodial caretakers. The incidence estimates were based entirely on the Household Survey portion of NISMART.

FAMILY ABDUCTION: DEFINITION

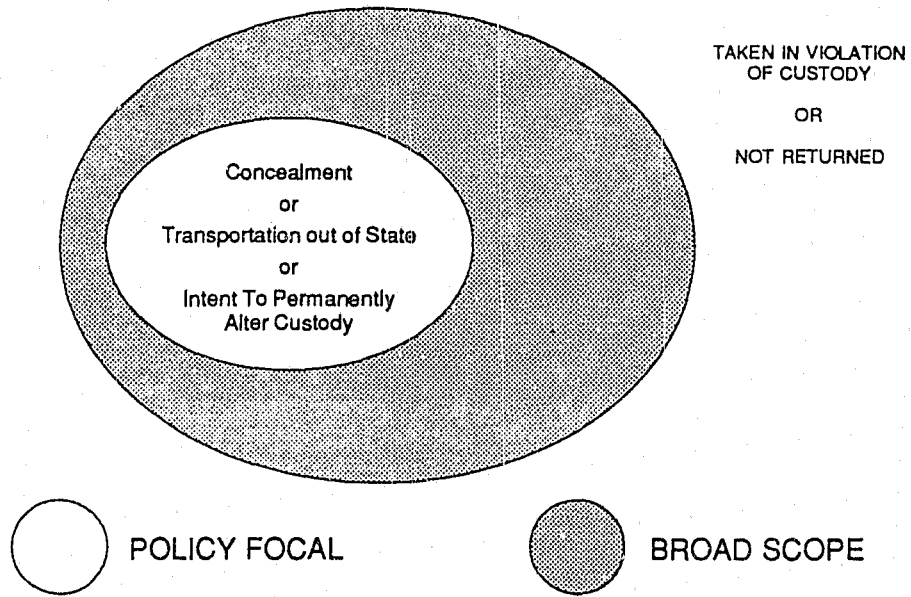


Figure FA-1

FAMILY ABDUCTION: INCIDENCE
1988

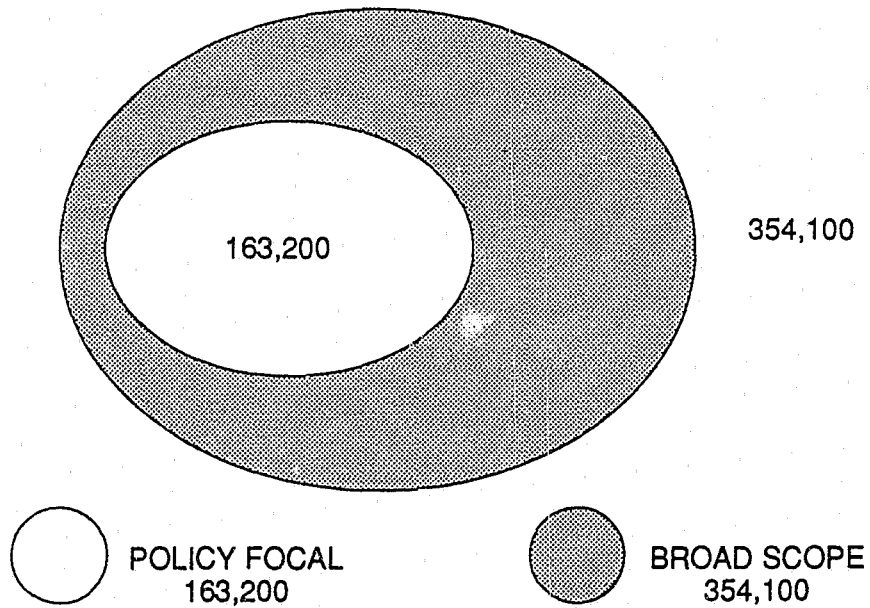


Figure FA-2

There were an estimated 354,100 Broad Scope Family Abductions in 1988 (Figure FA-2). This is quite a bit higher than earlier guesstimates of 25,000 to 100,000.

A Policy Focal Family Abduction was a more serious episode, entailing one of three additional aggravating conditions:

- 1) an attempt was made to conceal the taking or the whereabouts of the child or to prevent contact with the child; or
- 2) the child was transported out of State; or
- 3) there was evidence that the abductor had the intent to keep the child indefinitely or to permanently alter custodial privileges.

There were an estimated 163,200 Policy Focal Family Abductions in 1988, or 46 percent of the Broad Scope cases. Family Abduction had the largest estimated incidence of any Policy Focal category in NISMART.

Most of the Broad Scope Family Abductions were perpetrated by men, noncustodial fathers and father figures. Most victims were children from ages 2 to 11 with slightly more at younger ages, but relatively few infants and older teens. Half involved unauthorized takings, mostly from the children's homes; half involved failures to return the child after an authorized visit or stay.

The most common times for Family Abductions were in January and August. These are the times when school vacations end and visitations are exchanged. Most of the episodes lasted 2 days to a week, with very few, 10 percent, a month or more. In only a tiny fraction, 1 percent or less, was the child still being held by the abductor.

The period immediately after a divorce was not when most Family Abductions occurred. Instead 41 percent occurred before the relationship ended. Another 41 percent did not occur until 2 or more years after a divorce or separation. This was probably because it took time for parents to develop new stable households, move to other communities, develop new relationships and become disenchanted with the legal system--all factors that could precipitate abductions.

A number of figures give a sense of the scope of the most serious Broad Scope cases. In 1 out of 10 cases the child was removed from the State. In 3 out of 10 cases the child experienced serious or mild mental harm, according to the caretaker. In about a third of the cases, there was an attempt to conceal the child's whereabouts. In 4 out of 10 cases, the caretaker contacted the police. In 5 out of 10 cases, the caretaker contacted an attorney. Although sexual abuse is one of the most feared components of family abduction, its occurrence was unusual (less than 1%).

Also of interest, in half the episodes, the caretakers did know where the children were most of the time. The problem was not discovering the whereabouts of the child, but getting the child returned to proper custody.

There were interesting regional disparities in the occurrence of Family Abduction, with the South overrepresented and the Midwest underrepresented. It is possible that the more traditional legal system in the South makes noncustodial fathers pessimistic about getting a favorable outcome, so that they take matters into their own hands.

NON-FAMILY ABDUCTIONS

Much of the controversy about abductions by non-family perpetrators has really been over definitions. To the public, stranger abduction means notorious crimes like the Adam Walsh case. But in many States the legal definition of abduction is both encompassing and broad, including the coerced movement of many brief sexual assaults. When people hear high-incidence estimates based on the legal definition, many are disbelieving because they are thinking of cases like the Adam Walsh kidnapping. Thus, NISMART estimates were made for both Legal Definition and Stereotypical Kidnappings.

Legal Definition Non-Family Abduction meant the coerced and unauthorized taking of a child into a building, a vehicle, or a distance of more than 20 feet; the detention of a child for a period of more than an hour; or the luring of a child for the purposes of committing another crime (Figure NFA-1). Many short-term abductions that took place in the course of other crimes like sexual assault were counted under this definition.

Stereotypical Kidnappings required that 1) the child be gone overnight; 2) be killed; 3) be transported a distance of 50 miles or more; 4) be ransomed; or 5) that the perpetrator evidence an intent to keep the child permanently. The perpetrator also needed to be a stranger. A content analysis of newspaper articles showed that 92 percent of the crimes against children described with the words "abduction" or "kidnapping," in fact, met one of the five criteria. This confirmed that when reporters write and the public reads about abduction, they are thinking primarily of the Stereotypical Kidnappings.

NON-FAMILY ABDUCTION: DEFINITION

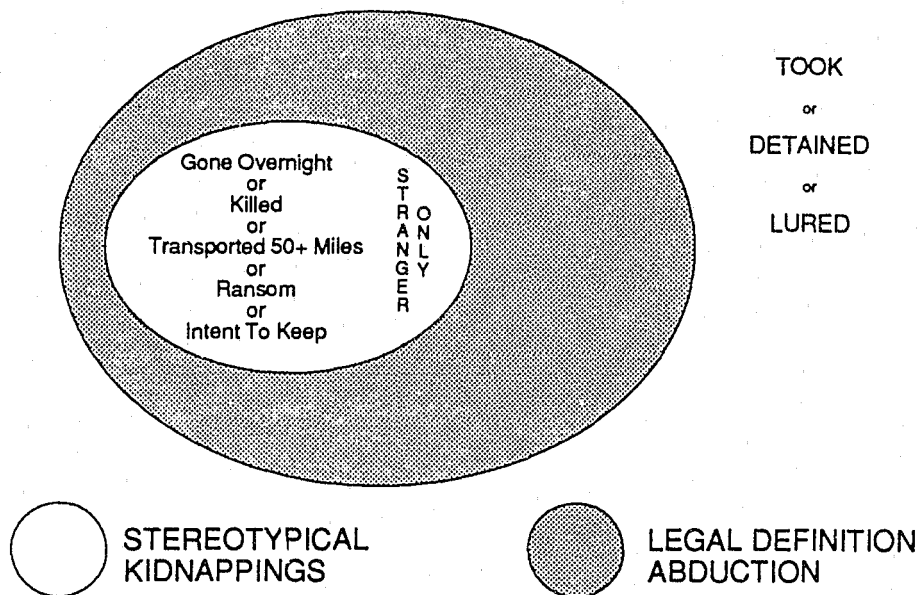


Figure NFA-1

NON-FAMILY ABDUCTION: INCIDENCE
1988

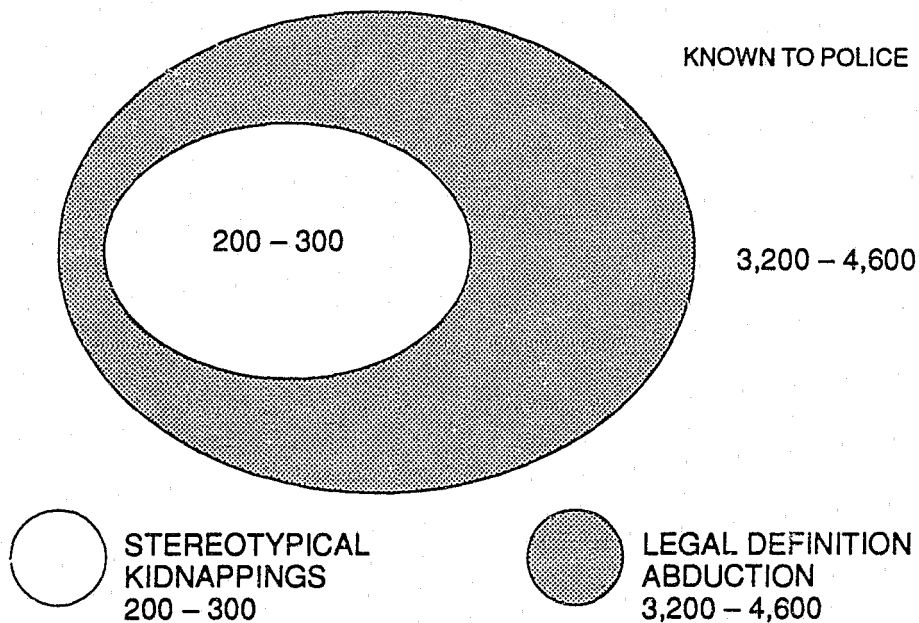


Figure NFA-2

Because of small numbers, no reliable estimates could be constructed from the Household Survey. So, the Non-Family Abduction estimates came primarily from the Police Records Study. In addition, we developed an estimate of the number of Stranger Abduction Homicides by reanalyzing 12 years of FBI homicide data.

There were an estimated 3,200 to 4,600 Legal Definition Non-Family Abductions known to law enforcement in 1988 (Figure NFA-2).

Of these, an estimated 200 to 300 were Stereotypical Kidnappings.

Based on FBI data, there were also an estimated 43 to 147 Stranger Abduction Homicides annually between 1976 and 1987.

Although we have a high degree of confidence in the estimates for Abduction Homicides and Stereotypical Kidnappings, we believe that the estimate for Legal Definition Non-Family Abduction may be low. A number of these Legal Definition Abductions may never be reported to the police, because the victims of these assaults or rapes are ashamed or intimidated. Such episodes would not be included in our estimate, which is based on police records.

Teenagers and girls were the most common victims of Non-Family Abduction. In Legal Definition Abductions, half the victims were 12 or older and three-quarters of the victims were girls. Blacks and Hispanics were heavily overrepresented among victims compared to the U.S. population.

Two-thirds or more of the Legal Definition Abductions involved sexual assault. A majority of victims were abducted from the street. Over 85 percent of the Legal Definition Abductions involved force, and over 75 percent involved a weapon. Most episodes lasted less than a whole day; 12 to 21 percent lasted less

than an hour. In 2 percent the child was still missing at the time of the last police entry into the file. In 14 to 21 percent the child was known to have been injured as a result of the abduction, but much information was missing from police records on this score.

The analysis of FBI homicide data from 1976 to 1987 showed no discernible change in the rate for Stranger Abduction Homicides over the 12-year period.

In the Household Survey, caretakers did report a large number of attempted abductions: an estimated 114,600, all involving strangers. Most of these consisted of an attempt by a passing motorist to lure a child into a car, and no actual harm or even coercion against the child occurred. In a majority the police were not contacted. Yet children seem to have a fairly large number of encounters with strangers where an abduction seems to have been threatened.

RUNAWAYS

Broad Scope Runaways were children who left home without permission and stayed away overnight (Figure RA-1). In addition, if children were already away and refused to return home, they were also counted as Runaways, depending on their age and the amount of time away: 2 nights away if they were 15 or older, and 1 night away if they were 14 or younger. The estimates for Runaways came from two sources: the Household Survey, and also from the Juvenile Facilities Survey, which counted children who ran from institutions.

There were an estimated 446,700 Broad Scope Runaways from households in 1988 (Figure RA-2). In addition, an estimated 12,800

children ran from juvenile facilities (Figure RA-3). Because many children who ran from facilities also ran from households during the same year, the joint number of Broad Scope Runaways from households and facilities was estimated to be 450,700 (the household estimate plus the 4,000 who ran from juvenile facilities only) (Figure RA-4).

Policy Focal Runaways were Broad Scope children who in the course of their episode were without a secure and familiar place to stay.

There were an estimated 129,500 Policy Focal Runaways from households (Figure RA-2). Since we considered all runaways from juvenile facilities to be Policy Focal, the joint number of Policy Focal Runaways from households and juvenile facilities was estimated to be 133,500 (Figure RA-4).

RUNAWAYS: DEFINITION

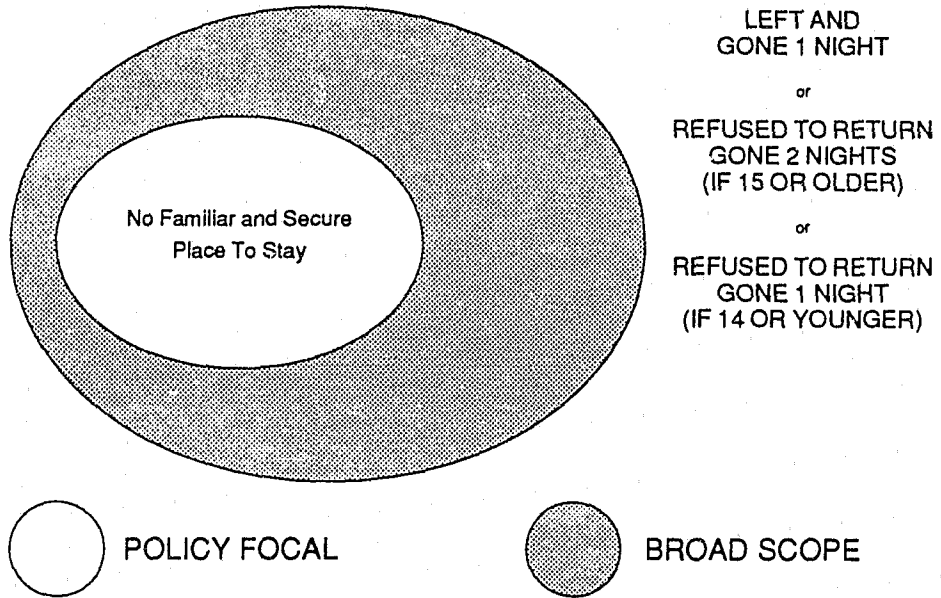


Figure RA-1

RUNAWAYS: HOUSEHOLD INCIDENCE
1988

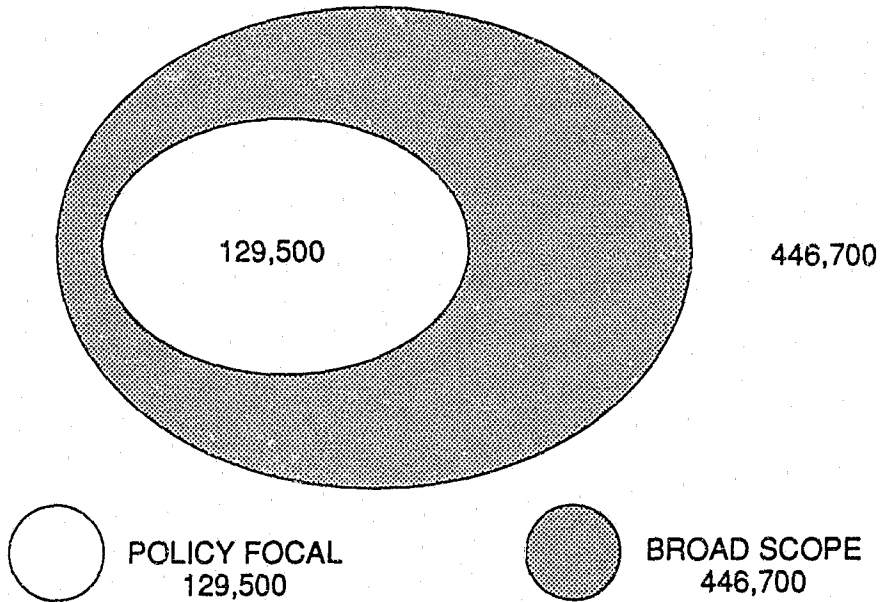


Figure RA-2

RUNAWAYS: JUVENILE FACILITIES INCIDENCE
1988

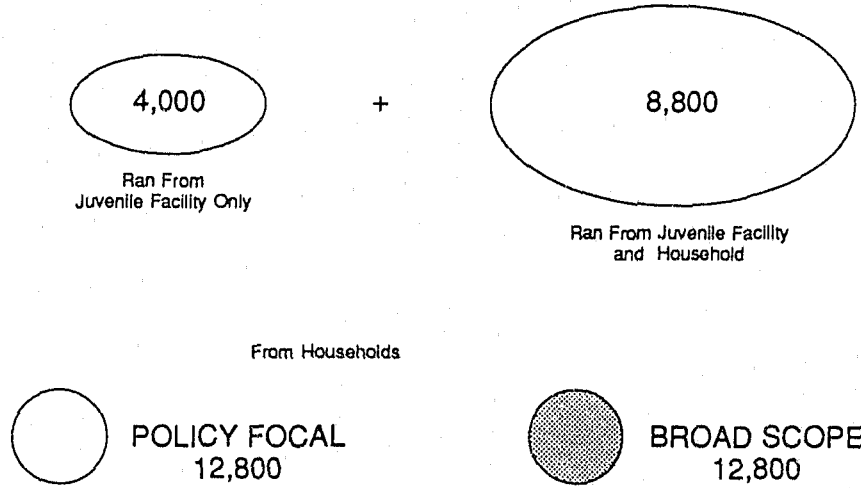


Figure RA-3

RUNAWAYS: TOTAL INCIDENCE
1988

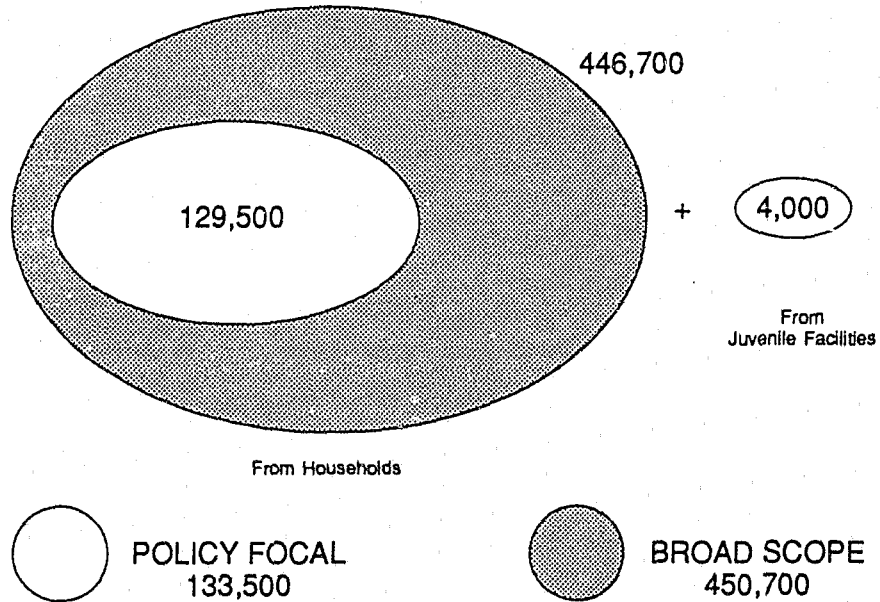


Figure RA-4

There was no evidence of any higher level of running away in 1988 than in 1975. A comparison of NISMART results with results from the 1975 National Statistical Survey on Runaway Youth, using very similar definitions and similar methodology, showed almost exactly the same rate of running away from households in both years.

Almost all Runaways were teenagers. They tended to come disproportionately from step-parent-type households (where a parent was living with a partner who was not the child's other parent), compared to the occurrence of such households in the general population. The runaways from facilities ran primarily from group foster homes, residential treatment centers, and other mental health facilities.

Runaway episodes occurred more often in the summer. Two-thirds of Broad Scope Runaways from households ran to a friend's or relative's home. Eighty-two percent were accompanied by others during the episode. Half returned within 2 days. For 39 percent, their caretakers knew their whereabouts most of the time.

Among the most serious Broad Scope household cases, however, 1 child in 10 went a distance of more than 100 miles. One child in 14 went out of State. And 1 in 10 was still gone from the home at the time of the interview. Three percent had been sexually abused and 1 percent physically harmed. Thirty-six percent of the Broad Scope children had run away previously in the last 12 months. The police were contacted in 40 percent of the episodes.

The runaways from juvenile facilities tended to have even more serious episodes. Almost one-half left the State. One-third were picked up by the police. One in 10 was placed in jail and 1 in 20

in a juvenile detention center. There were small percentages who got involved in prostitution (5%), drug dealing (3%), armed robbery (3%), and other crimes. The staff of the facilities knew nothing about the whereabouts of these children in half the cases. Police were contacted in 73 percent of the episodes.

THROWNAWAYS

A child qualified as a Broad Scope Throwaway if any one of four situations occurred: 1) the child had been directly told to leave the household; 2) the child had been away from home, and a caretaker refused to allow the child back; 3) the child had run away but the caretaker made no effort to recover the child or did not care whether or not the child returned; or 4) the child had been abandoned or deserted (Figure TA-1). In any case, the child had to be out of the household for at least 1 night.

The estimates for Throwaways came from two sources: the Household Survey, and the Community Professionals Study, which was used to estimate the number of children who had been abandoned.

There were an estimated 127,100 Broad Scope Throwaways in 1988, including 112,600 from the Household Survey and 14,500 who were abandoned based on the Community Professionals Study (Figure TA-2).

A Policy Focal case was a Throwaway who was without a secure and familiar place to stay during some portion of the episode. All the abandoned children were considered Policy Focal.

There were an estimated 59,200 Policy Focal Throwaways in 1988.

THROWNAWAYS: DEFINITION

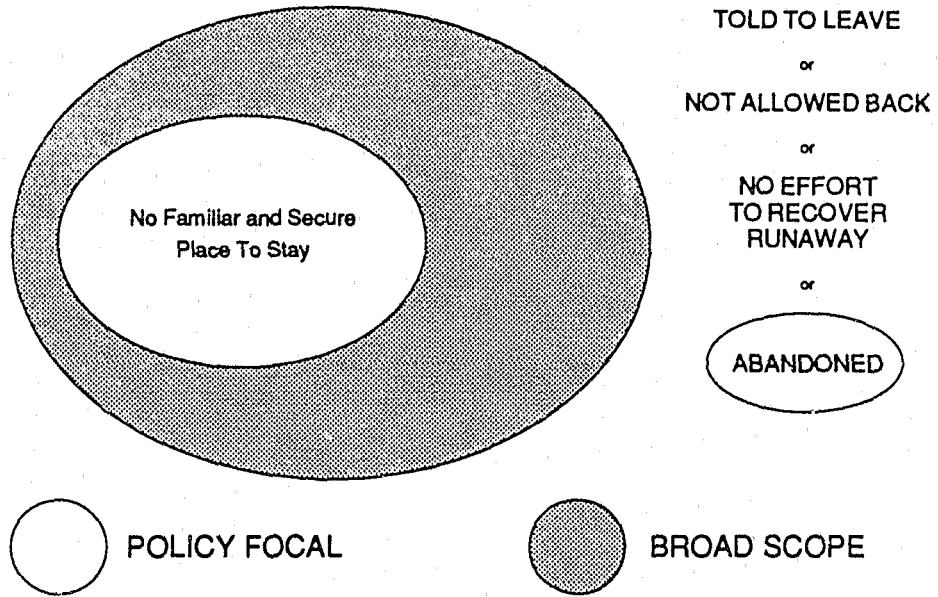


Figure TA-1

THROWNAWAYS: INCIDENCE
1988

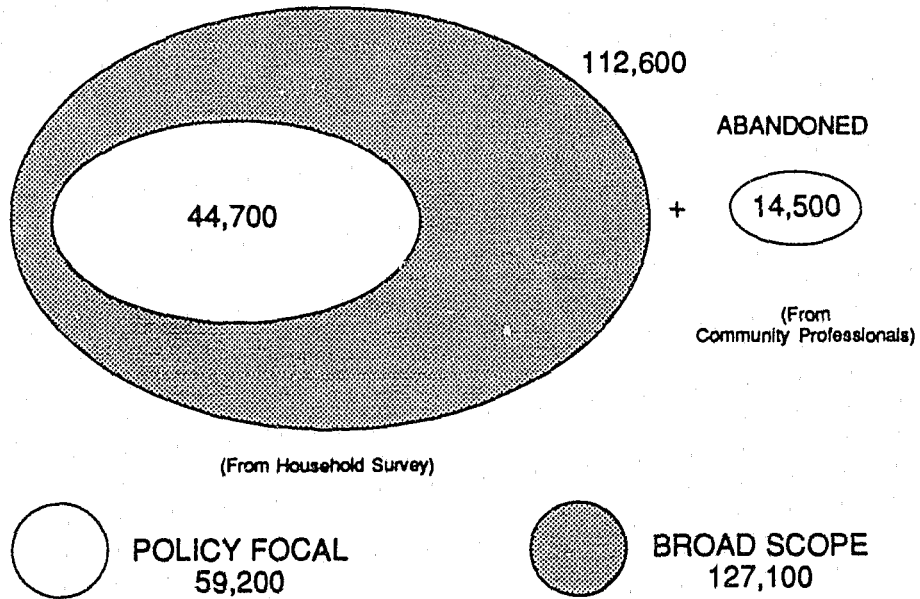


Figure TA-2

Throwaways constituted about 22 percent of the pooled group of Runaways and Throwaways, the group that in the past has simply been labeled Runaways.

The Broad Scope Throwaways identified in the Household Survey were predominantly older teenagers. By contrast, the abandoned children tended to be young, one-half under the age of 4. Abandoned children, in contrast to the other Throwaways, were also heavily concentrated in low-income families. In either case, fewer children from households with both natural parents were thrown away or abandoned than would have been expected based on their proportion of the U.S. population.

Broad Scope Throwaways from households tended to occur in the spring. Fifty-nine percent were preceded by an argument and 27 percent by violence. Most Throwaways went to the homes of friends and relatives. Most also stayed within a 10-mile radius of their home. In 60 percent of the cases caretakers claimed to know the Throwaway's whereabouts most of the time; but since many of these caretakers were not actually looking for the children, they may have expressed a false degree of confidence.

Among the most serious episodes, a full fifth of the Broad Scope Throwaways from households were still gone from their households at the time of the interview. This percentage of nonreturned children is higher than for any other category of NISMART children. Thirteen percent spent some night without a place to sleep. Fifteen percent had been in a juvenile detention center.

Compared to Runaways, Throwaways experienced more violence and conflict with their families and were more likely to still be

gone from their home. Also, fewer caretakers in Throwaway cases contacted the police.

LOST, INJURED, OR OTHERWISE MISSING

This was a mixed group of children, missing from their caretakers for a variety of reasons, who did not fit into the other categories. Broad Scope cases were defined as children missing for varying periods of time (from a few minutes to overnight) depending on the child's age, disability, and whether the absence was due to an injury (Figure LOM-1). The estimate for Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing was based entirely on responses from caretakers in the Household Survey.

There were an estimated 438,200 Broad Scope Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing children in 1988 (Figure LOM-2).

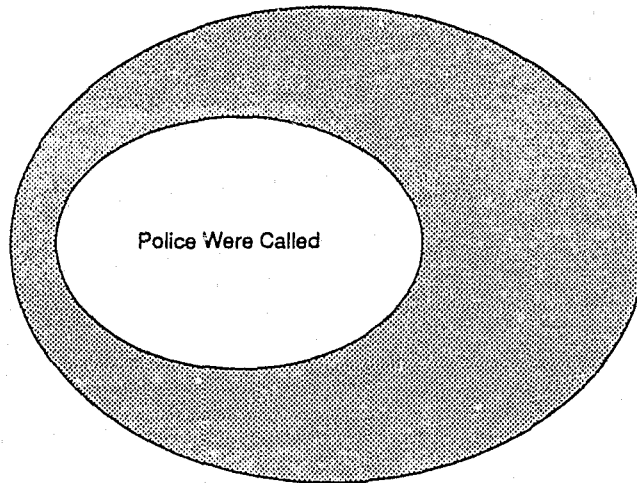
Policy Focal cases were Broad Scope episodes serious enough that the police were called.

There were an estimated 139,100 Policy Focal Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing children in 1988, or 32 percent of the Broad Scope children.

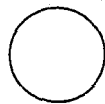
Two groups of children experienced the large majority of Broad Scope incidents: children under 4 (47%), for whom even short absences can be a source of alarm, and children 16-17 (34%), who are the most independent, involved in risky activities, and most likely to test, forget about, or misunderstand the degree of responsibility they have to inform parents about where they are.

Children who truly lost their own way accounted for only a small percentage (1%) of this group. Injured children made up 6 percent. The largest subgroup consisted of children who forgot

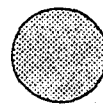
LOST, INJURED, OTHERWISE MISSING: DEFINITION



AGE	TIME MISSING
0-2	Any
3-4	2 hrs
5-6	3 hrs
7-10	4 hrs
11-13	8 hrs
14-17	Overnight
Disabled	Any
Injured	1 hr



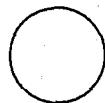
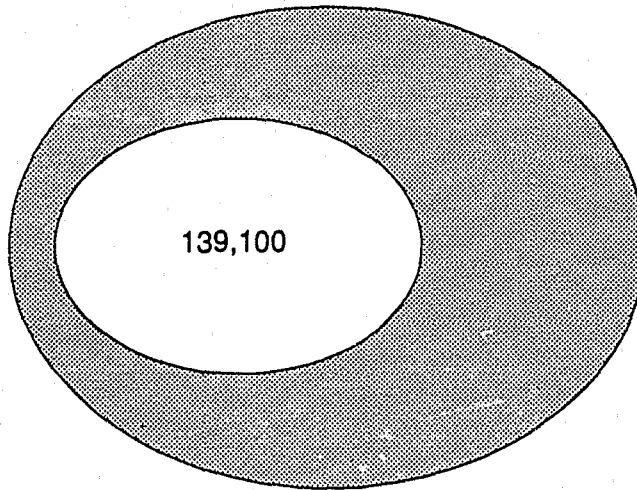
POLICY FOCAL



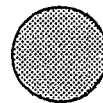
BROAD SCOPE

Figure LOM-1

LOST, INJURED, OTHERWISE MISSING: INCIDENCE
1988



POLICY FOCAL
139,100



BROAD SCOPE
438,200

Figure LOM-2

the time, misunderstood expectations, or whose caretakers misunderstood when the children would return.

Most of these episodes were short, a third lasting less than 6 hours. Only 2 percent were gone more than a day and only 1 percent were still missing at the time of the interview. Half the episodes occurred in the summer.

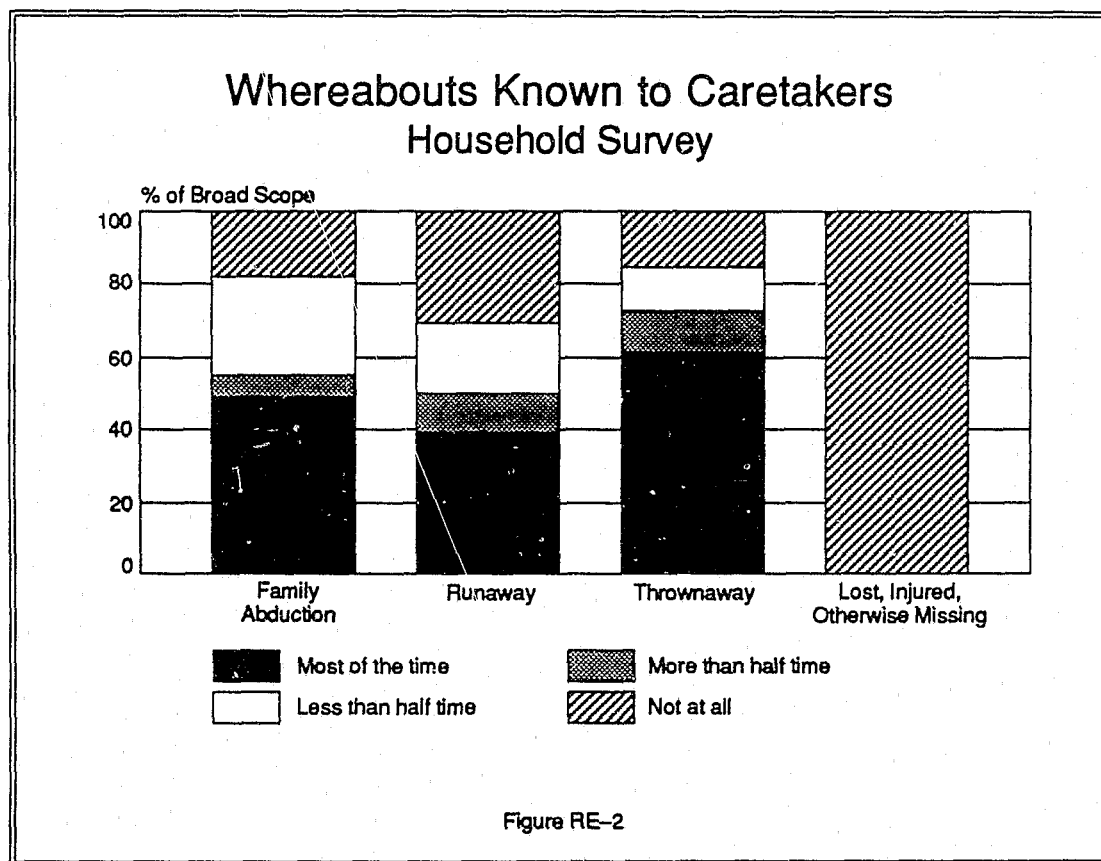
Although many of the episodes in this category appeared relatively benign, a substantial fraction seemed quite serious. In 21 percent the child experienced physical harm. In 14 percent the child was abused or assaulted in the course of the episode. This is more harm than in any other category except Non-Family Abduction. Moreover, in 32 percent of Broad Scope cases, caretakers were alarmed enough that the police were called (these are the Policy Focal cases).

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

NISMART drew two important conclusions concerning the overall "missing children" problem.

1) Although the five problems studied here are often grouped together as one--"missing children"--in fact, they are extremely dissimilar social problems. They affect different children and different families. They have very different causes, different dynamics, different remedies, different policy advocates, and different types of institutions and professionals who are concerned. They could not be lumped together for meaningful scientific analysis.

2) There was a second serious obstacle to grouping these five categories of children under the rubric "missing children": not all these children were literally missing. As the studies revealed, a large proportion of the caretakers knew where their children were most of the time during the episodes. For example, in the case of family abductions, only 17 percent of the children had their whereabouts not at all known to caretakers (see Figure RE-2). Many caretakers knew that the children were at the home of their ex-spouse, but they could not get them back. In the case of runaways from households, only 28 percent of the children were entirely missing. Most runaways were known to be at the homes of friends or relatives. Even in the case of non-family abductions, most episodes were so short-lived, as in the case of an abduction and rape, that the child may not have been missed by anyone.



Thus, we determined that it was not possible to develop a meaningful and useful global figure for the "number of missing children." First, because of the profound differences among the problems, it did not make sense from a scientific standpoint to add together such disparate episodes as runaways, stranger abducted children, parentally abducted children and so forth, or even some portion of each of these problems, into a single number of so-called missing children. Second, children in these categories were "missing" in different senses, and in many cases, as we pointed out earlier, not missing at all. Finally, when such numbers as these have been lumped together in the past, it has created a great deal of confusion. People have assumed that missing children meant children who had been abducted or who had permanently disappeared. Thus, all the statistical findings and conclusions of this study are made about the five distinct social problems, and there are no global figures. We specifically discourage anyone from trying to create or use such a global number on the basis of NISMART statistics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Public policy around what has become known as "missing children" needs to clarify its domain. It needs to be more specific about which children and which situations are included, why they are included, and what they are to be called. If the five problems studied here need an overarching framework, we propose the compound term "Missing and Displaced," rather than the simple term "Missing."

2) Public policy needs to more clearly differentiate each of the separate social problems included under the so-called "missing children" umbrella.

3) We recommend increased attention to the problem of Family Abduction. The incidence of this problem proved larger than earlier estimates, and its 163,200 Policy Focal cases were the most numerous of all Policy Focal categories. Family Abductions may well be on the rise and yet could be readily amenable to prevention.

4) We recommend that all policy, publication, and research on the problem of Runaways take into account the difference between Runaways and Throwaways. Throwaways are a large group with different dynamics; they suffer from being lumped together indiscriminately with Runaways.

5) We recommend special attention and an increased policy focus on the problem of children who run away from institutions. These children are among the most chronic runaways and the ones at highest risk of becoming crime victims and perpetrators; they need a specialized approach.

6) We recommend new attention to the problems of children who fell into our category of Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing. This group, as numerous in total as Runaways, experienced substantially more physical harm than any other category except those who were victims of Non-Family Abductions. The 139,000 children reported to police in this category are almost as numerous as the Runaways reported to police. Some of the children in this category probably experienced quite minor episodes, but others were

very serious cases. A policy about missing children needs especially to include the serious group in this category.

7) We recommend that another set of incidence studies be undertaken 5 years from now, conducted largely along the lines of the present approach with a few modifications. These modifications would include a more comprehensive canvass of police records, a more direct sample of juvenile facilities, and a planned coordination with future child abuse and neglect incidence studies. In addition, we urge that interim methodological studies be undertaken to improve the future incidence efforts.

8) We recommend that the Department of Justice consider the possibility of ongoing data collection systems, for example, using the National Crime Survey or a police-based "sentinel" system that could provide yearly incidence statistics for some categories of missing and displaced children.

Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Throwaway Children in America
First Report: Numbers and Characteristics

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	i
Acknowledgments	iii
Executive Summary	v
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Conceptualizing the Problem	3
NISMART's Approach	18
Chapter 2 Methodology	27
Household Survey	30
Juvenile Facilities Survey	49
Returned Runaway Study	56
Police Records Study	63
FBI Data Reanalysis	71
Community Professionals Study	74
Definitions	77
The Presentation of Findings	80
Chapter 3 Family Abduction	85
Defining Family Abduction	87
Brief Review of Data Sources	92
The Incidence Estimates	94
The Demographics of Family Abduction	98
Characteristics of Family Abduction Episodes	103
Conclusion	114
Family Abduction Summary Sheet	118
Chapter 4 Non-Family Abduction	119
Defining Non-Family Abduction	122
Brief Review of Data Sources	128
The Incidence Estimates	132
Demographics of Non-Family Abductions	142
Characteristics of Non-Family Abductions	148
Attempted Non-Family Abductions	156
Conclusions	160
Non-Family Abduction Summary Sheet	170

Table of Contents (Cont'd.)

Chapter 5	Runaways	171
	Defining Runaways	174
	Brief Review of Data Sources	178
	The Incidence Estimates	182
	Demographics of Household Runaways	189
	Characteristics of Household Runaway Episodes	194
	Demographics of Juvenile Facility Runaways	207
	Characteristics of Juvenile Facility Runaway Episodes	214
	Conclusion	221
	Household Runaways Summary Sheet	224
	Juvenile Facility Runaways Summary Sheet	225
Chapter 6	Throwaways	227
	Defining Throwaways	230
	Brief Review of Data Sources	234
	The Incidence Estimates	240
	The Demographics of Throwaways	247
	Characteristics of Throwaway Episodes	255
	Conclusion	267
	Throwaways Summary Sheet	272
Chapter 7	Lost, Injured, and Otherwise Missing Children	273
	Defining Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing Children	275
	Brief Review of Data Sources	279
	The Incidence Estimates	280
	Demographics of Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing Children	282
	Characteristics of Lost, Injured or Otherwise Missing Episodes	287
	Conclusion	294
	Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing Summary Sheet	298
Chapter 8	Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusion	299
	Summary	299
	NISMART Correspondence with Congressional Mandate	316
	Limitations of the Study	325
	Recommendations	329
	Conclusion	343
References	349
Appendix I	Estimated Incidence	357
Appendix II	Guide to Definitions	361
Other Products from NISMART	379

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Throwaway Children were designed to estimate the incidence of five categories of children:

- 1) Children who were abducted by family members;
- 2) Children who were abducted by non-family members;
- 3) Children who had run away away from home;
- 4) Children who had been thrown away by their caretakers; and
- 5) Children who were missing for some other reason, for example, because they had gotten lost or injured.

Concern about the presence and the fate of children such as these rose to a new level in the U.S. during the 1980's in the wake of several highly publicized disappearances.¹ But good statistics about the extent and nature of most of these problems did not exist. The absence of good figures created controversy² and made it difficult to plan effective programs and public action.

Congress, among others, recognized the need for reliable incidence statistics, and in the 1984 Missing Children's Assistance Act mandated studies to obtain them:

"The administrator shall ... periodically conduct national incidence studies to determine for a given year the actual number of children reported missing each year, the number of children who are victims of abduction by strangers, the number of children who are the victims of

¹ For historical background about the missing children problem, see Gentry, C. (1988). The social construction of abducted children as a social problem. Sociological Inquiry, 58, 413-425.

² For example, Griego, D. & Kilzer, L. (1985). Exaggerated statistics stir national paranoia. Denver Post, May 12, 12A.

parental kidnappings, and the number of children who are recovered each year." Missing Children's Assistance Act PL 98-473, Section 404(b)(3).

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), which holds responsibility for Missing Children's programs, implemented this mandate in several stages. In August 1985, it convened a meeting of researchers from within and outside the government to consider alternative strategies for an incidence study. Based on recommendations from that meeting, several pilot studies were undertaken, the first of which began in March 1986. The results of these pilot studies were evaluated by an expert design panel, which generally confirmed the feasibility of incidence studies and recommended their implementation. Finally, work on the current study, which became known as the National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMART), began in November of 1987.

The major goal of NISMART was to gather evidence on which to base sound estimates, estimates derived according to well-established scientific methodology, and using clear and consensual definitions and procedures that could be replicated by other researchers.

At the same time, NISMART sought to clarify the meaning of such numbers. By describing the kinds of children and situations underlying these numbers, the studies were intended to address some of the questions that continue to interest the public and policymakers.

Conceptualizing the Problem

Any scientific effort to measure a problem requires that it first be carefully conceptualized and defined. But in the case of what had come to be called the missing children problem, the process of definition and conceptualization revealed a daunting complexity. This concept was not a simple, single entity. It was not created by or for researchers and statisticians. Rather, it was an ambiguous, conglomerated concept with all the problems of a politically molded history.

We quickly recognized three complexities, among many others, that were crucial to confront at the outset.

- First, this was not a single problem -- missing children. It was a set of several very different and separate problems that were aggregated primarily for reasons that were political or operational, not philosophical or scientific.

- Second, the term "missing children" was inexact. Many of the children discussed under this rubric are not truly "missing." This creates great confusion about who missing children are.

- Third, people concerned about missing children had serious but nonetheless honest and understandable disagreements about how to define all the problems. These disagreements grew out of different needs, different vantage points on the problem, and different semantic traditions. Since their resolution lies more in the realm of policy than in research, they cannot be quickly settled for the purpose of making a simple count.

Our conceptualization of each of these points is worthy of elaboration.

Not a single problem

The public mobilization about a missing children problem during the 1980's began with a concern about stranger abduction. But a variety of other problems were quickly grafted on to this initial issue. First, many of the parents who joined the mobilization to find missing children were really seeking children who had been abducted by spouses in the course of custody disputes. Then law enforcement officials pointed out that, for them, missing children had to include the runaways, who make up such a disproportionate share of their missing children reports and also are often at first difficult to differentiate from abducted children. Not coincidentally, the large numbers of runaways added substantial bulk to the numbers of missing children. But when runaways were at first labeled the "voluntary" missing, child advocates protested that many so-called "runaways" had not left home because they wanted to, but because they had been thrown out, kicked out, or pushed out by parents who no longer wanted them. Their condition was not so truly "voluntary."

So in spite of terminology, missing children became not a unitary problem but rather an aggregate of problems, amalgamated primarily for political, strategic, and institutional considerations. This fact has been recognized by a semi-official subdivision of the missing children's problem into the following categories: 1) stranger abduction, since broadened to "non-family" abduction in order to include cases such as babysitters who abscond

with children; 2) parental abduction,³ broadened now to family abduction to include such episodes as cases where grandparents or siblings abduct children; 3) runaways; 4) throwaways, who are also sometimes referred to as "castaways" or "pushouts." This last category is not always distinguished from runaways. We prefer the term throwaway for these children, for reasons explained later.

Finally, in our examination of the literature, we believed there to be yet another large category of children who are missing, but who are sometimes not included in the official subdivision of missing children: 5) these are children who are lost (for, example in woods or airports), injured (for example, knocked unconscious in a bicycle accident), or missing due to some misunderstanding. We have called these children the lost, injured, or otherwise missing.

These categories of children do have some common connections; for example, police are called to search for children in any of these categories. But available evidence suggests that, at their basis, these categories represent fundamentally different social problems with different causes and remedies, and remarkably different types of advocates and different social institutions surrounding them. They have less in common than is suggested by their assembly under the rubric of missing children and do not necessarily benefit, even politically, from being lumped together.

For example, non-family abduction is almost exclusively a law enforcement problem. Dealing with it requires classic "crime

³ Federal legislation refers to stranger "abduction" and parental "kidnapping." For purposes of this study, however, the terms abduction and kidnapping are used interchangeably.

fighting" functions: tracking down and capturing the perpetrator, recovering the child, and prosecuting the offender. Family abduction is another matter; there are usually two sides to these stories, both claiming justice to be on their side. Although law enforcement is often involved, family abduction cases also have their own unique cast of added characters and settings which include the family courts, custody decrees, lawyers representing both parties, and mental health experts. There is professional disagreement about how endangered the children generally are in these cases, and whether law enforcement action increases or decreases this danger. Some believe the main solutions to this problem involve civil rather than criminal actions. Others would like to see the use of criminal sanctions intensified.

Runaways are yet another matter. They are primarily a family problem. Some advocates wish to respect the runaways' own desires to sever ties with their families. Police are divided about whether they have any legitimate role in this problem whatsoever, especially given the conflicting messages they have received from policymakers over whether they have the power to detain such so-called "status offenders." Most runaway (and throwaway) policy has traditionally been within the social welfare sector, and a network of shelters and counseling services exists to work with this problem along with school counselors, family therapists, and other mental health workers.

So the problems differ on many dimensions. One way we conceptualize the differences among the five problems is to consider for each problem: What is the source of the threat to

children's health and safety. Our thinking can be illustrated diagrammatically. Figure IN-1 portrays the threats to children as a circle with three poles, each representing one of three main threats: 1) threats from caretaker actions, of which the most quintessential might be child abuse or neglect; 2) threats from the child's own actions, of which the most quintessential might be suicide or drug abuse; and 3) threats from external agents, human or environmental, of which the most quintessential might be illness or accident.

The five problems studied here occupy quite distinct locations in this "conceptual space." Family abductions are primarily actions undertaken by caretakers. But insofar as these abductors are sometimes external to the home where the child is living, family abduction might be placed a bit toward the External Agent pole. Non-family abductions are primarily committed by External Agents to the family, but to the extent that some of the perpetrators may be babysitters or other members of the family's network, these episodes may be seen as partially toward the Caretaker pole.

Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing is a mixed category, a bit difficult to place. The first two situations, getting lost or injured, primarily entail the forces of the external environment (or an external human agent as in the case of a car accident), although to some extent behavior of the child him or herself can contribute (for example, if the child is behaving recklessly). So most of this category belongs on the Child side of the External Agent pole. At the same time, it turns out that many of the

"other" episodes in this category involve misunderstandings between parents and children (see Chapter 7). These probably belong near the center of the circle, equidistant from the Child, Caretaker, and External Agent poles. We have left these misunderstandings out of the diagram, however, until we understand more about these events.

Running away is generally self-initiated; however, it almost always occurs in a situation of family conflict, where caretaker actions have played a part. So this locates running away at the Child pole on the Caretaker side. Being thrown away is primarily a caretaker-initiated action, but behavior of the child sometimes plays a part; this puts it at the Caretaker pole on the Child side.

Not only does Figure IN-1 illustrate some of the important differences among the NISMART categories, but it also suggests that some of the categories have more in common with other child welfare problems, not included in NISMART, than they do with each other. Thus, for example, being thrown away has much more in common with other forms of intrafamilial child abuse and neglect than it does with non-family abduction. For a throwaway child, the child's whole socioemotional support system is threatened. The child is rejected. There is no one to look for the child or comfort the child on return. This is not the case with the non-family abduction, where usually a caring family wants a child back and is available to look for the child and support the child upon return.

THREATS TO CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY

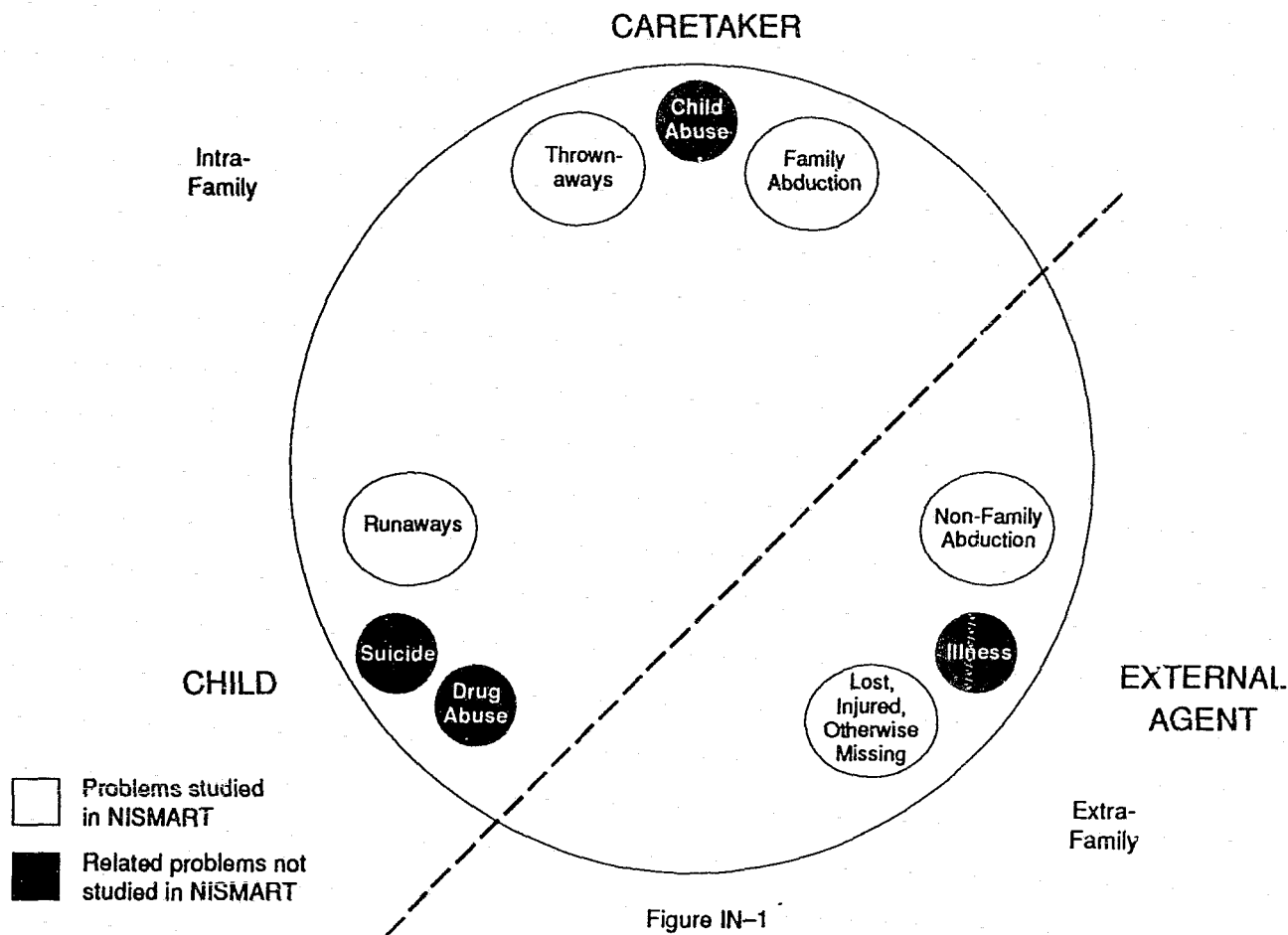


Figure IN-1

Similarly, lost and injured children have more in common with children who have suffered illnesses and accidents than with children who have run away. Such children may need emergency assistance, but not the mental health and family counseling that may be of utmost importance to the runaway. Runaways have more in common with victims of drug abuse and suicide than with victims of family abduction, who are primarily caught up in a struggle in which they have no part.

Not surprisingly, such differences among these various problems have made it very difficult to have any unified policies concerning all missing children. For example, hotlines for parents to help them find their children do little to help children who have been booted out of their homes because their parents do not want them. Federal custody reforms, which prevent parents from fleeing to another State to get a custody decree more to their liking, do little for the parents whose children are lost in the wilderness. There appears to be no social policy that can effectively address these problems as a unified group. They are separate problems.

The problems do have some commonality in that each can result in children being out of their homes or missing from the point of view of their caretakers. But this is not the most important feature of these problems, nor is it reason enough to consider a unified approach to intervention. Being missing or out of the household is actually best seen as a symptom, and a symptom can have many different meanings.

A good analogy to illustrate how very different problems can share a symptom is the problem of chest pain in the practice of medicine. Chest pain is a widespread and widely feared medical condition. Yet while chest pain can be a symptom of some very serious illnesses like a major heart attack, it can also result from some quite minor problems like muscle strain or a hiatal hernia. It can be a sign of diseases as dissimilar in origin as cancer or heart disease.

These problems share almost nothing in common except for the symptom of chest pain. But chest pain is not a disease itself. Physicians have to study chest pain primarily to learn how to differentially diagnose the underlying diseases or conditions that produce chest pain. But there is no generalized treatment for chest pain. There is no medical specialty for chest pain, as there is for heart disease, cancer, or gastrointestinal problems. There is little basic research on chest pain, except as a way to improve differential diagnosis.

For a child to be missing or out of the household is an equally ambiguous symptom. Missingness can signify some truly terrible problems, that a child has been abducted and perhaps murdered, for example, but it can also signify some very minor problems, such as a parent or child misunderstanding when the child was supposed to return. Just as there are thousands of people each year who mistake minor health problems for a heart attack, there are thousands of parents who mistake minor episodes for a stranger abduction.

The symptom of missing children does need to be studied-- primarily to learn how to differentially diagnose the various causes. Rapid differentiation of stranger abductions from runaways and misunderstood expectations is just as crucial as the rapid differentiation of heart attack from the other causes of chest pain. However, it needs to be recognized that the underlying problems are very different and require different forms of intervention and prevention.

Thus, the so-called missing children problem really is a diversity of problems. Any effort to study such an issue must begin by recognizing this diversity and taking it into account.

The non-missing missing

A substantial amount of confusion and a fair degree of misunderstanding have been engendered by the term "missing children" itself, which is really a misnomer for the problems to which it is applied. We recognized that any counting of missing children needed to deal with this confusion.

According to available research and case material, if missing children are defined as those whose "whereabouts are unknown" to parents or guardians,⁴ then many children in the various missing children categories are not literally missing (as figures presented subsequently confirm, see especially Chapter 8, Figure RE-2). For example, a stranger may abduct a child on her way home from school, take her to an isolated place, rape her and release her, all before

⁴ Full congressional definition is quoted later in this chapter.

her parents realize that anything is wrong. This child is not literally missing. In the case of parental abduction, aside from the fact that in many cases at least one parent (the abducting parent) does know where the child is, there is also the fact that in many cases the location of the child may be well-known even to the aggrieved parent. "He is in Cincinnati with my ex-husband Bruce, and I can't get him back." This is also true in the case of runaways. A substantial portion of parents actually know where their child is: "at a friend's house," or "at his uncle's." These are not literally missing children.

In regard to the term "missing," the case of throwaways may in fact be the most anomalous. If a parent has thrown a child out and does not care where he is, should the fact that the parent does not know where he is make him a "missing child"? In reality, the child may be just down the block with a friend, a telephone call away. But the parent does not know because he is not looking. It seems strange to call this a missing child, on a par with a child kidnapped by a stranger.

Moreover, whether a child is missing is not even a good indicator of the seriousness of an episode. To take the most horrible example, a child shopping in a local convenience store can be abducted and murdered in the course of a robbery and getaway, but the parents may not even know anything is awry until they receive a sudden call from the police. This was never a missing child, but the child has been abducted and murdered by a stranger.

So "missing child" is something of a misnomer when indiscriminately applied to all these problems. Elsewhere,⁵ we have suggested that these various problems might be better assembled under an expanded rubric: missing and displaced children. "Displaced" means the children are not where they are supposed to be. The parentally abducted child in Cincinnati with the ex-husband, or the runaway or throwaway at the friend's house, and even the girl raped on her way home from school may not be literally "missing," but they all are "displaced" (i.e., not where they are supposed to be).

The point here illustrates some of the complexity that has clouded previous discussions in this field. The concept of missing child and the concept of abducted or runaway child do not neatly coincide. These discrepancies have to be considered in conducting any incidence study.

Definitional disputes

A third complexity concerns definitions. Discussion is difficult and counting virtually impossible when people have differing definitions of a problem. Yet in our review of the literature it became clear that there were no commonly agreed upon definitions in these areas. There were legal definitions of some of these problems; then there were colloquial definitions or stereotypes which sometimes differed quite substantially from the legal definitions. There were police or law enforcement

⁵ Finkelhor, D., Hotaling, G., & Sedlak, A. (1990). Defining missing children for the purposes of counting them. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

operationalizations of these problems that also varied from the strict legal definition and from the definitions that the affected parents and children might use. Finally, there was the congressional definition, which, despite its intent, did not truly clarify matters.

For example, there are some big definitional controversies about the problem of stranger abduction. Abduction is defined variously in the laws of the 50 States, but in many States it includes unlawful detention or the coerced movement of a person as little distance as a few feet. So the child dragged into an alley and raped has indeed, according to this standard, been abducted. The popular stereotype of abduction, however, conditioned by notorious crimes like the Lindbergh or Adam Walsh kidnappings, is much narrower: It usually requires that the child be taken a substantial distance, for a substantial period of time, or with the intent to keep or kill.

A similar difference surrounds parental abduction. Some State laws define it as an abduction for a parent to take or keep a child for any length of time in violation of a custody decree. But the popular image of a parental abduction is that of a parent who flees to another city, State, or country with a child, or who hides the child incommunicado.

There are definitional disputes in the case of runaways as well. When children tell their families they are leaving or write a note and walk out the door, this is often a family crisis of major proportions. Parents and children have little difficulty calling this a runaway episode. But to police, only episodes of

a certain magnitude and seriousness make a difference. They know that most runaway situations resolve themselves rather quickly without danger to the child. To many police, who cannot afford to be mobilized for the tens of thousands of minor episodes, the runaways to be concerned about are the children who are in danger and in need of police protection. They do not want to see numbers of runaways inflated with what are, to them, relatively trivial cases.

The 1984 Missing Children's Assistance Act tried to clarify matters with its own definition of a missing child, which read as follows:

...an individual less than 18 years of age whose whereabouts are unknown to such an individual's legal custodian if:

- a) the circumstances surrounding such individual's disappearance indicate that such individual may possibly have been removed by another from the control of such individual's legal custodian without such custodian's consent; or
- b) the circumstances of the case strongly indicate that such individual is likely to be abused or sexually exploited.

Rather than settling issues, this approach had its own definitional problems. For example, the girl on the way home from school, abducted, raped, and released: Is she missing according to this definition? Although her parents may not have missed her, technically her whereabouts were unknown to them and she was sexually exploited, so she could be said to be missing under this definition. But by this construction, virtually every molestation that occurs out of the sight of a legal custodian is a missing

children's episode. This is a broader definition of missing than almost anyone has advocated.

Another problem with the congressional definition is that it is extremely imprecise when it comes to runaways. Presumably it would count only runaways whose whereabouts are truly unknown to a legal custodian. But it would also limit inclusion to runaways where the "circumstances strongly indicate that such individual is likely to be abused or sexually exploited." Exactly which children are these? Some people contend that any runaway is at increased risk for abuse or exploitation. Or it could very narrowly apply only to runaways who end up in neighborhoods where prostitution is rampant. Since girls are at higher risk for sexual abuse than boys, it probably means counting more girl runaways than boy runaways as missing. The congressional definition added these kinds of ambiguities to an already somewhat confused field.

So the missing children's field is littered with definitional disputes. These disputes are not minor and arbitrary. They grow out of legitimate needs. Parents, for their part, like to see their priorities reflected in definitions. When their child is taken somewhere, raped, and released, they do not want someone to tell them their child was not abducted because the child was only gone 1 hour. But others are legitimately concerned that too broad a definition of stranger abduction will instill unreasonable fear in the public about the likelihood of their child becoming another Adam Walsh. So each definitional approach has its arguments and adherents.

These disputes pose a major problem for an incidence study. It is not possible to count instances of a phenomenon until the phenomenon is clearly defined. But there is no agreement on definitions and, unfortunately, consensus-building is not a scientific enterprise.

NISMART's Approach

After a careful analysis of the missing children's problem, it was clear that a scientific approach to estimating incidence could not rely on some widespread assumptions in the field. Missing children was not a simple entity that could be counted. The problem was too complex, too ambiguous, and too poorly defined. Too simplistic an approach would merely perpetuate and deepen current misunderstandings and controversies. So we have chosen an approach which we believe is faithful to the complexity of these problems and to the current conceptual disagreements of the field. This approach starts from the following premises:

No global estimate

1) We have neither sought nor tried to estimate a single, global figure for the "number of missing children." We have concluded that it does not make sense scientifically or serve a useful policy purpose to add together runaways, stranger-abducted children, parentally abducted children, and so forth to form a single number of so-called missing children. As we pointed out earlier, these problems are very different and the children they involve may not even be missing. These five problems together do

not necessarily constitute a "universe" of something with a clear name and a clear boundary. As we suggested before, it makes more sense to aggregate throwaways with other victims of child abuse than with lost and injured children.

It could be argued that dissimilar items are sometimes added together in indices like the Uniform Crime Index. This happens, however, only when 1) the items have some conceptual commonality, 2) the items are linked by tradition, or 3) there is some policy objective in doing so. We think the problems studied here do not have enough conceptual commonality. (They are not all crimes.) The linkage among them is recent, not a tradition and not a linkage that has proven itself. And finally, we see no strong policy reason for aggregating these problems.

In fact, the aggregation of these problems has been a source of much misunderstanding. In their Pulitzer prize winning critique of the missing children's estimates, Griego and Kilzer wrote, "These numbers reflect the confusion and complexity of missing children numbers that often fail to differentiate between three types of cases: runaways, parental abductions, and stranger abductions."⁶ The problem is that the phrase "missing children" gets equated with stranger abductions by many people. They then misunderstand any aggregate number of "missing children" as reflecting the number of children who were abducted by strangers. To present such an aggregate number from this study would be to perpetuate such a confusion.

⁶ Griego, D., & Kilzer, L. (1985), op. cit.

Those who are looking for a simple number in answer to the question, "How many missing children are there?" will not find it here. And we strongly discourage any attempt to use the findings here to create such a number. The correct answer to the question, "How many missing children are there?" is another question: "What particular problem do you mean? Children abducted by non-family members? Children who run away? Children who are throwaways?"

Independent problems

2) We have treated these problems as independent problems. We give separate incidence figures for each of the five problems (non-family abduction, family abduction, runaways, throwaways, and lost, injured, and otherwise missing children). We have separate chapters related to each of these problems. In very few cases, except in this introduction and when referring to the "movement," do we use the term "missing children" to refer to this group of problems. These are not studies of the incidence of missing children but, as the title says, of "Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Throwaway Children."

Of course, these problems are related in some ways, and some are related more than others. For example, it is sometimes hard to distinguish a runaway from a throwaway. Where these relationships exist, we will point them out. But overall, these problems benefit greatly from independent treatment. The research questions are very different for different problems. For example, in the case of runaways or throwaways, we are very interested in whether child abuse played a role leading up to the episode. In

the case of a lost or stranger-abducted child, such a question would appear to be blaming the victim. Moreover, the methodologies we used for different problems were different. We conducted one special independent study to help estimate non-family abductions, and another special study to help estimate throwaways. All this reflects our treatment of these problems as separate.

Undoubtedly, this will be frustrating to some who have gotten into the habit of thinking of the "missing children's problem" as a whole. However, it is our belief that the vast majority of involved professionals are concerned with one or two but rarely all of these independent problems. Only a rather small group of national policy experts and missing children's advocates think about this as a single problem. Our independent treatment of these problems should make the findings much more useful to professionals involved in each individual area.

Multiple definitions

3) Within each problem, we present incidence estimates according to at least two definitions. In the analysis preliminary to these studies, it became clear that definitional disputes, not statistics, were at the heart of many controversies. One possible solution was simply to choose a definition and organize the study around it. Unfortunately, however, the definitional disputes usually existed because each definition had its own merits and reflected some important need or point of view. To arbitrarily choose one would risk exacerbating rather than illuminating the

controversy. So it made sense to us to clarify the definitional difference and provide estimates according to each definition.

Broad Scope and Policy Focal definitions. Thus, (with the exception of non-family abduction, for reasons detailed below) we have estimated the incidence of each problem according to two definitions: first, what we call a "Broad Scope" and then a "Policy Focal" definition.

"Broad Scope" generally defines the problem the way the persons involved might define it. It includes more minor episodes that may nonetheless be alarming to the participants. Thus, any child who leaves without permission and is gone overnight is counted as a Broad Scope Runaway regardless of danger. Any child who is taken by a family member in violation of a custody agreement (formal or informal) is counted as a Broad Scope Family Abduction regardless of the difficulty or rapidity of the child's recovery.

By contrast, "Policy Focal" generally defines the problem from the point of view of police or other social agencies. This category is restricted to episodes of a more serious nature, where without intervention a child may be further endangered or at risk of harm. Thus, only those runaway children who are without "a familiar and secure place to stay" are considered Policy Focal Runaways. This category excludes the kinds of situations that police and others may consider quite minor, where a child runs to a friend's or a relative's home and spends the night. Similarly, Policy Focal Family Abductions are restricted to serious episodes where the abductor tries to hide the child, or takes the child to another State or tries to change the custody privileges on a

permanent basis. This category excludes more minor episodes where, for example, a noncustodial parent keeps the child an extra night beyond the agreed-upon arrangement.

The term "Policy Focal" is meant to imply that these are generally the types of episodes in which public agencies, like police, and policymakers have traditionally taken a greater interest. It is not meant to imply, however, that they or anyone else should ignore the Broad Scope cases. Broad Scope cases constitute social problems. Some professionals are very concerned about such cases--for example, family therapists and guidance counselors in regard to Broad Scope Runaways, and family court judges and attorneys in regard to Broad Scope Family Abductions.

These two definitions--Broad Scope and Policy Focal--seem to satisfy the need for an incidence estimate of the problem that includes most of what is colloquially thought of as runaway, family abduction, or lost, for example, and at the same time a figure that shows the portion that policymakers and the public believe is the cause for alarm.

Legal Definition Abductions vs. Stereotypical Kidnappings. A different and highly charged definitional debate has created controversy surrounding the problem of non-family abduction. Under the law, and for purposes of prosecution, a large number of sexual assaults and other crimes entail some "abduction"--the unlawful, coerced movement or detention of another person. These episodes are usually very short-term, even if terrifying. However, most people who hear about child abductions conjure up images of Adam Walsh, children who are held captive for a substantial time or

children who are taken to some remote location. Incidence figures based on the broader, technical definition are clearly misleading to people who are thinking of these notorious, stereotypical crimes.

Thus, we have created two definitions of non-family abduction: the Legal Definition Abduction and the Stereotypical Kidnapping. The Legal Definition Abduction corresponds to the technical crime of abduction as it is specified in the criminal law of many States. It does not necessarily require substantial movement or lengthy detention. Many crimes that are primarily thought of as rapes or sexual assaults fit into this category. The Stereotypical Kidnapping, by contrast, follows more closely the popular stereotype of a kidnapping. It requires that a child be gone overnight, be transported more than 50 miles, be killed, be ransomed, or that the perpetrator be intending to keep the child. The abductor also has to be an actual stranger to the child. This corresponds more to the tabloid or general media image of child abduction. The inclusion of the Stereotypical Kidnapping seemed very important since previous estimates based solely on the Legal Definition led to widespread misunderstanding, generating both alarm and disbelief.

The challenge to the field

Our decision to deal with the various component problems independently and to use multiple definitions may even further frustrate those looking for a simple answer. Not only do we offer no single number for "all missing children," but we do not even

offer a single number for each individual problem. Instead, we have estimates for Legal Definition Non-Family Abduction and Stereotypical Kidnapping. We have estimates for Broad Scope Runaways and Policy Focal Runaways.

This does pose a number of understandable challenges. It means that people have to have some understanding of the NISMART concepts before they can make sense of the numbers. It also means that there are a variety of figures for people to remember and cite. This makes the presentation of findings more cumbersome. News articles cannot simply say, "The number of missing children is estimated to be"

But some of these challenges we also see as advantages. With our approach, we believe people will be less likely to use figures casually without knowing their referents. They will be less likely to consider the idea of "missing children" to be synonymous with "stranger abduction." People can specify and use the figure that refers to the actual phenomenon in which they are interested. The approach draws attention to distinctions that have been frequently made but too frequently ignored. It demands that users adopt a more complex view of the problem. We believe that the public and policymakers alike are ready for and capable of a more sophisticated understanding of these problems and will welcome this approach.

Unfortunately, though, there is a fair degree of cynicism about statistics in today's world. People in the heat of partisan passions often feel justified in using and manipulating statistics however they want, in order to better support their own prejudices.

We recognize that we cannot control the use to which these numbers are put. But we urge those who read and use this report to be circumspect and, among other things, to respect the following recommendations:

- Do not pull figures out of context.
- In presenting the figures, repeat the cautions and limitations that we mention.
- Use and specify the definitions and terminology developed by the study.

The numbers reported here are not just numbers. They represent children who were in crisis for one reason or another. Whether they appear relatively large or small, they are a measure of suffering. We must make every effort not to treat them casually. We must penetrate their simple surface to try to understand the complex human experiences that they represent. By remaining mindful of the complex human experiences these numbers reflect, we will be better able to use them as guides in preventing and alleviating the suffering of children.

Chapter 2

METHODOLOGY

NISMART consisted of six separate studies, several of them quite complex and involving a substantial amount of technical detail. In this chapter, we present a nontechnical overview of the studies. We only discuss matters readers really need to know for an understanding of the findings and their limitations. For those interested in a fuller description, detailed methodological reports are available.

The six NISMART studies and their objectives were:

1) Household Survey. A telephone survey of 34,822 randomly selected households, yielding interviews with 10,544 caretakers of 20,505 children, to find out how many of the children in these households had been abducted, run away, thrown away, lost, or otherwise missing.

2) Juvenile Facilities Survey. A survey of facilities where children resided to find out how many had run away from these facilities.

3) Returned Runaway Study. An interview study with children who had run away and returned home to find out if children's accounts of events concerning possible runaway episodes matched the accounts given by their parents.

4) Police Records Study. A study of police records in 83 law enforcement agencies in a national random sample of 21 counties to find out how many non-family abduction episodes were reported to these agencies.

5) FBI Data Reanalysis. Reanalysis of FBI data to determine how many children were murdered in conjunction with possible abductions by strangers.

6) Community Professionals Study. A study of 735 agencies that have contact with children in a national random sample of 29 counties to determine how many children known to these agencies have been abandoned or thrown away.

In all the studies, the goal was to estimate the number of children who had experienced an episode during a 1-year period. Children are the focus of the estimate, not the number of episodes (some children had more than one episode and some episodes involved more than one child) or the number of households affected (some households had more than one child with an episode).

The scope, variety, and complexity of these studies grew out of an attempt to realize several objectives:

1) We wanted to obtain reliable estimates that would apply to the United States as a whole.

2) We wanted to get beyond the usual "official sources" to obtain estimates based on cases that would not necessarily be "officially reported."

3) We wanted to use sampling methodologies that would allow for scientifically sound extrapolations from smaller samples to the United States as a whole.

NISMART had been preceded by 3 years of OJJDP-sponsored groundwork: discussions among experts both inside and outside the Government as well as 2 years of pilot work by researchers at

Northwestern University and the University of Illinois.^{1,2} Many of the conclusions of this developmental effort informed NISMART's structure and design. Among these conclusions were the following:

- Different types of episodes would require different methodologies, both because the different problems had different anticipated sizes and because different sources of information had different degrees of reliability.

- A random-digit dialing telephone survey with a sample of sufficient size could be used to produce reliable estimates at least for the runaways and perhaps for other types of episodes. Moreover, pilot work showed that caretakers in such surveys would be highly cooperative in providing information. This led to the central role of the Household Survey in NISMART.

- Network sampling was judged to be a possibly feasible way to assess the incidence of abductions, both family and non-family. This led NISMART to include a network sampling component in the design of the Household Survey. However, it did not prove to be successful.

- Because the number of non-family abductions might be particularly small, too small to be measured in a household survey, it was recommended that data on this problem should be gathered

¹ Lavrakas, P.J., & Rosenbaum, S.M. (1986, December). Pilot-testing telephone survey methods for measuring the incidence of missing children and associated attitudes, perceptions and experiences. Evanston IL: Northwestern University Survey Laboratory.

² Sudman, S., Cowan, C., Blair, J., & Khodadadi, K. (n.d.). Study the Incidence of Missing Children by Special Survey Methods. Final report on grant 86-MC-CX-0002 from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

from police files. This led NISMART to include a Police Records Study.

- The pilot work found discrepancies between child and parent interviews concerning events. This led NISMART to include a study of returned runaways.

Three other studies grew out of the groundwork done within NISMART itself. A decision to include a Juvenile Facilities Study grew from a concern in the developmental stages of NISMART that previous studies of Runaways based entirely in households had missed an important group of youth who ran away from institutions. The FBI Data Reanalysis was undertaken because NISMART researchers were familiar with FBI homicide data and believed that this resource had not been adequately investigated as a source of information on abduction homicides. The Community Professionals Study grew out of a concern that the Household Survey would miss an important group of throwaway children: those completely abandoned by their parents.

What follows are short descriptions of each of the studies. You may also obtain more detailed methodological reports that give additional technical information on the samples, weighting procedures, questionnaire design, statistical methods, data gathering, and data analyzing procedures of each study.

Household Survey

The Household Survey consisted of telephone interviews with a large, nationally representative sample of households to find out if any of the children in these households had run away, been

thrown away, abducted, lost, or were otherwise missing. This was the most extensive of the NISMART studies. Computerized, random-digit dialing procedures were used to generate the sample and phone the households. Highly trained interviewers talked with the person in each household who had primary caretaking responsibility for the children. Each caretaker was asked a series of screening questions (see below) to find out whether there had been any "missing child" episodes in the last year. If there was an episode, a great deal more information was gathered.

The Household Survey approach was chosen as the centerpiece of NISMART for a variety of reasons:

- 1) We believed that a large number of the episodes of interest to this study would not be known to anyone besides caretakers and members of the children's household. Many episodes, particularly in categories like Family Abduction and Runaway, never come to the attention of any public agency such as the police or shelters. Moreover, we cannot presume that even all "serious" episodes would be known to public agencies. Thus, to get a full incidence picture, we believed it necessary to talk to caretakers themselves.

- 2) We believed that caretakers would provide the most accurate information about the episodes. Since these are, for the most part, major events in the life of a household, household members should be able to give the most detail about them.

- 3) Since an issue for the study was whether children were actually "missing" from the vantage point of their caretakers, we believed it necessary to actually talk to caretakers.

4) Population surveys have the potential for providing the most accurate incidence estimates. There is a highly refined scientific methodology for surveying a national random sample of households and extrapolating the findings to the Nation as a whole, based on years of census, labor market, public opinion, and consumer research. A household survey on missing children could take advantage of these techniques.

5) Feasibility studies conducted in Illinois using a population survey methodology^{3,4} convinced us that, while there were problems that needed to be addressed, a telephone survey of households could work and, in particular, that caretakers would be extremely cooperative.

Thus, there were clear advantages to a household survey.

Survey size

The occurrence of many everyday events or characteristics (such as rate of seatbelt use or smoking) can be estimated accurately with national samples as small as 1,000. But to accurately estimate rare events, much larger samples are required. In this survey, we called a sample of 60,000 telephone numbers in the United States, which led us to 34,822 households, of which 11,617 had children under the age of 18 who had lived there for at least 2 weeks in the preceding year. Episode screener questions were asked of 10,544 households concerning the experiences of 20,505 children. This is many times the size of the typical

³ Lavrakas, P.J., & Rosenbaum, S.M. (1986, December). Op. cit.

⁴ Sudman, S., Cowan, C., Blair, J., & Khodadadi, K. (n.d.). Op. cit.

national telephone survey, and more on the order of the massive studies conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the National Center for Health Statistics.

Telephone methodology

In the last decade, national surveys have increasingly switched to telephone methodology in place of sending interviewers to households. Telephone surveys are much less expensive and time consuming and have a number of other advantages. For one, it is much easier to supervise interviewers (by directly listening in on their interviews) to achieve high quality and consistency. For another, in an era of fearfulness about crime, both respondents and interviewers are less threatened. Interviewers can be more persistent in making contact (not deterred by darkness and unfamiliar or dangerous neighborhoods), and respondents are less intimidated by the arrival of a stranger. Telephones also increase the sense of true anonymity. The National Crime Survey, a periodic survey of 45,000 American households on crime victimization, already does more than half its interviewing over the telephone.

Although many lay people are initially skeptical about the validity of telephone surveys, especially on sensitive subjects, this skepticism is apparently unwarranted. There have now been many years of study systematically comparing the results of telephone and in-person surveys on a variety of topics. These

studies have not found any consistent disadvantage to telephone surveys.^{5,6,7}

One common objection to telephone surveys is the fact that not everyone has a telephone. However, this is a problem that social scientists have studied and for which there are solutions. Overall, the number of U.S. households without telephones is not very large; estimates⁸ place the figure at only 7 percent. In addition, lack of a telephone is strongly correlated with income, and to some extent with geography. A standard statistical procedure in telephone surveys can adjust the results by social class and by region to compensate for the underrepresentation of households in those groups that may have been missed. Other adjustments also correct for the fact that some households have more than one phone, and thus a greater chance of being called. (A more detailed description of these techniques is available in a report on the Household Survey Methodology.) So many of the methodological problems of phone surveys can be minimized.

Spanish-language version

Early in the design phase, we debated whether to develop a Spanish-language version of the questionnaire and decided against

⁵ Groves, R., & Kahn, R. (1979). Surveys by telephone: A national comparison with personal interviews. New York: Academic Press.

⁶ Marcus, A., & Crane, L. (1986). Telephone surveys in public health research. Medical Care, 24, 97-112.

⁷ Bradburn, N. (1983). Response effects. In P. Rossi, J. Wright, and A. Anderson (Eds.), Quantitative studies in social relations: Handbook of survey research. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.

⁸ Thornberry, O., Jr., & Massey, J. (1988). Trends in United States telephone coverage across time and subgroups. In R. Groves, P. Biemer, L. Lyberg, J. Massey, W. Nicholls, and J. Waksberg (Eds.), Telephone survey methodology. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

it. Prior telephone survey experience at Westat indicated that the lack of a Spanish language version would have only a minor impact. First, even in predominantly Spanish-speaking households, some adult household member is usually able to speak English. Moreover, our procedures involved repeated callbacks to initially nonparticipating households, so the chance of finally finding an English speaker in these households was enhanced. Ultimately, from an analysis of our response rates we estimated (see Household Survey Methodology report) that we lost only about 5.5 percent of Hispanic households due to an unresolvable language problem. Moreover, because of the way that Household Survey data were weighted, we were able to statistically correct for this slight loss of Hispanic children.

Interview procedure

The interviews were conducted by extensively trained and carefully supervised telephone interviewers employed by the Telephone Research Centers of Westat, Inc., a firm that conducts hundreds of thousands of research telephone interviews each year and has one of the most sophisticated survey research operations in the country. The routine portions of the interview were programmed onto computer screens to assist the interviewers in following the somewhat complicated interview. The computer generated and, at a later time, scheduled and dialed the selected telephone numbers. Most calls were made during evening hours, when people are usually at home, and if no one answered, eight or more callbacks were made on different days of the week and at various

times of day. This massive number of interviews took place between July 26, 1988, and February 3, 1989.

Interviewers introduced themselves as representing the University of New Hampshire in an Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention-sponsored study concerned with "children's safety and how to better protect them from dangerous situations." They ascertained whether there were children in the household (or had been children in the household during the last year) and asked to speak to the children's primary caretaker.

Episode screeners

Once on the line with the primary caretaker, 76 percent of whom were women, the interviewer obtained an inventory of the children who had lived in the household for two consecutive weeks in the previous year, and then read the following preamble:

"We know some unfortunate things can happen to children. They can get lost, hurt, or victimized, or be taken somewhere or kept from you without your permission. I am going to ask you some questions about events that may have happened to [these children] during the time they were living in your household during the past 12 months."

Then the interviewer asked a series of screener questions, designed to inquire about the type of events of interest to the study.

1. Was there any time when anyone tried to take [any of these children] away against your wishes?

In the past 12 months, did any family member outside of your household, such as an ex-spouse, brother, sister,

parent or in-law, or someone acting for them, do any of the following things ...

2. ... take or try to take [any of these children] in violation of a custody order, agreement or other child living arrangement?

3. ... keep or try to keep [any of these children] from you when you were supposed to have them even if for just a day or weekend?

4. ... conceal [any of these children] or try to prevent you from having contact with them?

5. Have you or someone acting for you or another adult in your household taken or kept [any of these children] when it was not your time to have them according to a custody order, agreement or arrangement?⁹

6. Was there any time when an adult or other child tried to sexually molest, rape, attack or beat up any of these children?

[Questions 7 through 10 were asked only if a child 7 or older was in the household:]

7. In the last year did [any of these children] leave home without permission and stay away for at least a few hours?

8. Did [any of these children] choose not to come home from somewhere when they were supposed to and stay away for at least 2 nights?

9. Did you or any adult member of your household force or tell [any of these children] to leave home or decide not to allow them back in the home?

10. Was there any time when having [any of these children] in your home became a lot of trouble and they left?

11. Other than anything you have already told me about, has there been any time, either currently or during the past 12 months, when you did not know where [any of these children] were living?¹⁰

⁹ Abandoned as an unproductive question after the early stages of data collection.

¹⁰ Ibid.

12. Was there any time when [any of these children] was seriously hurt or injured and as a result didn't come home and you were concerned about where they were?

13. Was there any time when you were concerned because you couldn't find [any of these children] or they didn't come home?

14. In coming to this household were [any of these children] forced or told to leave any household?

15. Has anyone ever kidnapped or tried to kidnap [any of these children]?

Detailed attention and extensive pretesting went into the development of the screener questions. Their design reflects a number of objectives.

1) We wanted there to be multiple opportunities for a respondent to disclose each particular type of episode. Thus, for example, a family abduction episode might have been disclosed in response to screeners 1,2,3, or 4, a runaway episode in response to screeners 7, 8, or 13, and so forth. Prior research¹¹ suggests that more questions give respondents more chances either to remember or to take the risk to disclose.

2) We wanted to avoid as much as possible relying on the respondent's interpretation of such words as "abduction" and "runaway" which could be subject to different meanings.

3) We wanted to cast a broad net for possible episodes. The screeners were meant to be broader than our ultimate definitions. This allowed us to get details on many episodes and to exclude those that failed to meet the definitional requirements. Without

¹¹ Peters, S.D., Wyatt, G., Finkelhor, D. (1986). Prevalence. In D. Finkelhor with S. Araji, L. Baron, A. Browne, S. Peters and G. Wyatt (Eds.), A sourcebook on child sexual abuse. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

this strategy, we would have risked missing some relevant episodes. The broad questions led us to decide what counted, not the respondents.

If respondents indicated that one of these episodes had occurred to a child in that household, then they were asked some additional short qualifying questions. If the episode still fit, a longer series of questions was asked about its details, including when it occurred, how long it lasted, how it was resolved and whether the child suffered harm as a result. On the basis of this information, episodes were later evaluated to see if they met the study definitional criteria. For those households with no episode, the entire interview usually took about 8 minutes. For those with an episode, however, interviews were lengthy, most lasting 40 to 50 minutes and some even longer.

Other sections of the Household Survey

The interview also contained a number of other sections. Demographic and social information as well as some data about family life events and family relationships were gathered about any household that reported an episode. Episode families with a parent who lived out of the home were also asked questions about their child custody arrangements.

To allow later analyses to ascertain whether there were any family characteristics that might be "risk factors" for having an episode, we needed to compare these episode families to nonepisode families. Thus, we asked the same family-related and demographic questions of a systematic sample of nonepisode families.

In addition, a number of other "substudies" were embedded in the structure of the Household Survey (see Figure ME-1).

Network study. When an event, like a stranger abduction, is rather uncommon, one possible substitute for a truly enormous survey of households is to ask respondents in a smaller number of households to report on children in households other than their own; for example, in some clearly defined set of relatives' households (which is called a "network"). A feasibility study of this method¹² did not give us confidence that it would produce an accurate estimate. However, since we were already doing a large survey, it was easy to include an additional test of this method. Thus, we asked all respondents (not just those with children in the household) if they had any brothers, sisters, nieces or nephews under age 18 in other households who had been kidnapped in the last 12 months and by whom (family or non-family person). We also needed to know the exact number of children and other households in this "network" in order to extrapolate to the country as a whole. Apart from using this approach to decide whether the "network" method was feasible for estimating incidence, we also wanted to see whether the method could be a way to get in contact with families where abductions had occurred, to get information on more events. This methodology turned out to be inadequate on both counts. Too few episodes were mentioned to make a reliable estimate, and respondents were reluctant to supply us with ways to contact other members of their network.

¹² Sudman, S. (1987). The use of network samples in estimating incidence of missing children. Preliminary report. Urbana, IL: Survey Research Laboratory, University of Illinois.

Structure of the Household Survey and Substudies

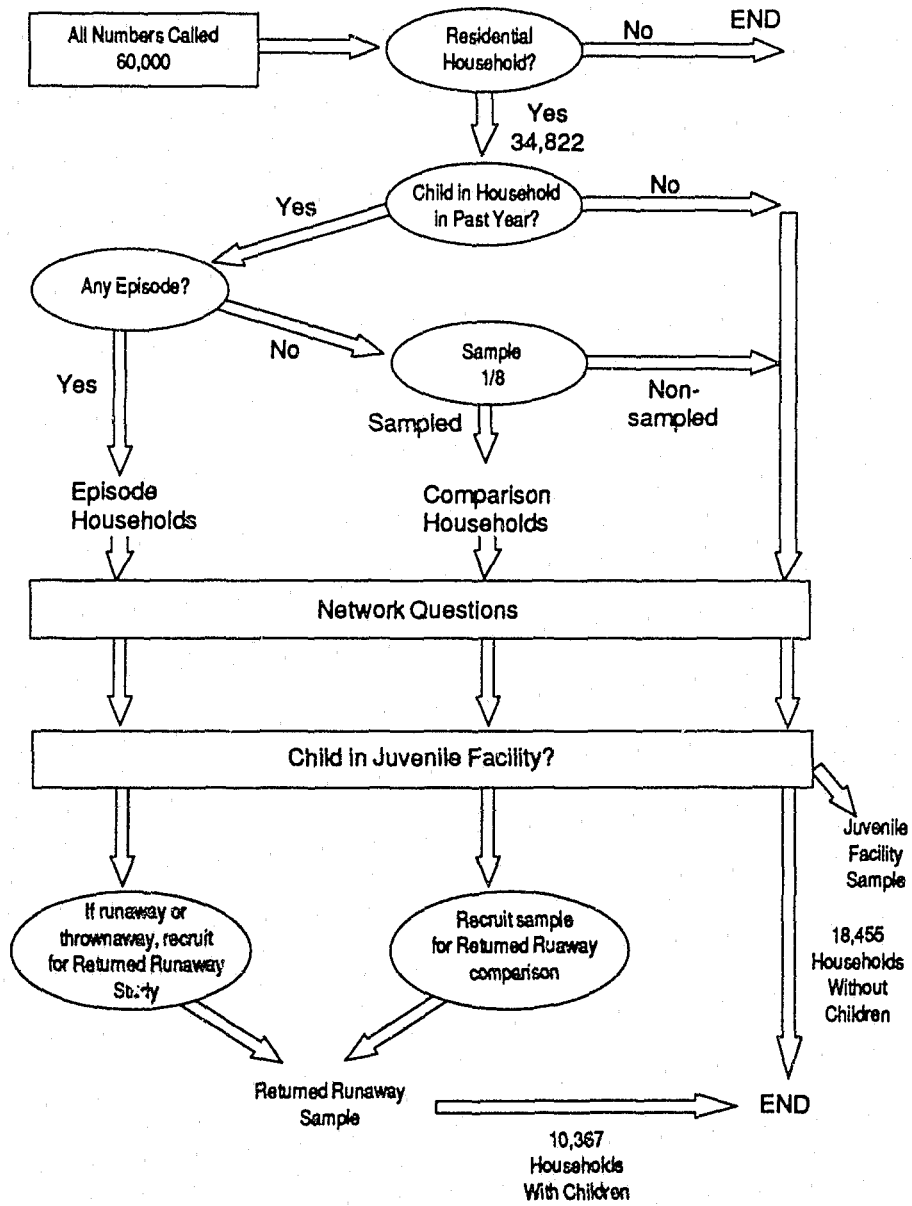


Figure ME-1

Juvenile Facilities Survey and Returned Runaway Study. Two other NISMART studies started with samples generated by the Household Survey. Questions were used to identify juvenile facilities where children had lived for at least 2 weeks in order to generate a sample for the Juvenile Facility Study (see below). In households where a child had run away and returned, questions solicited participation of the runaway child in the study of Returned Runaways (see below).

Sample statistics

The welter of numbers describing the survey can be confusing to those with little technical interest in survey research. Table HS-1 gives a few important numbers pertaining to components of the Household Survey. At the beginning of recruitment efforts, 60,000 randomly selected phone numbers were called. This led us to 34,822 actual households. The remainder were businesses, nonworking numbers, car phones, and numbers that never answered. Of the households, we were only interested in the 11,617 where children actually resided for at least 2 weeks during the preceding year. In 1,250 of these households we were never able to talk to a caretaker, or the caretaker refused to participate or broke off the interview at some point. We began the episode screener section with 10,544 households in which 20,505 children resided. This group was the focus of our analysis efforts. We actually completed the full interview in 10,367 households, which contained a total of 20,138 children. The completion of interviews in 10,367 households out of the 11,617 known to have children reflects a

response rate of 89.2 percent which is a very high completion rate for a telephone or in-person interview study.

Table HS-1. Sample Statistics for Household Survey

Sample	#
<u>Recruitment</u>	
All numbers called	60,000
Residential households located	34,820
Residential households completing interview	28,822
Households with children	11,617
Household with children completing interview	10,367
Completion rate with eligible households	89.2%
Completion rate with all households	82.8%
<u>Episode</u>	
Households with eligible episode	689
Households beginning in-depth questions	681
<u>Network Study</u>	
Adults answering network questions	28,822

Of the households asked screening questions, 1,912 answered "yes" to at least one. But many of these had episodes too minor to inquire about further or for some other reason disqualified. A total of 689 households actually qualified for and 681 entered into the in-depth sections. Because some households had more than a single episode, a total of 858 eligible episodes were recorded.

To understand certain subcomponents of the Household Survey, several other sample statistics are relevant. As we described earlier, a comparison group of households without episodes was included in the in-depth sections of the study to allow us to look

for demographic risk factors related to having episodes. A one-eighth sample of all nonepisode households was selected for this comparison, which ended up being 941 cases. A further subgroup of 474 of these comparison cases was selected to be asked more extended family-life events and relationship questions, also in a search for risk factors.

The network questions were asked of all adult respondents, whether or not the household had children. There were 34,822 eligible respondents of whom 28,822 actually answered the network questions, for an 82.8 percent response rate.

Memory

In going directly to caretakers for information on episodes, the Household Survey was designed to find out about more episodes in more detail than could be discovered from the counting of records in agencies. But even on this score, the survey was far from perfect. There are well-known problems in surveys in regard to respondents' ability to remember fully and also in their willingness to confide.^{13,14,15} Moreover, since some of the questions pertained to events that occurred while a child was away, caretakers may have had incomplete or erroneous knowledge.

¹³ Sudman, S., & Bradburn, N.M. (1974). Response effects in surveys: A review and synthesis. Chicago, IL: Aldine.

¹⁴ Cannell, C.F., Miller, P.V., & Oksenberg, L. (1981). Research on interviewing techniques. In S. Leinhardt (Ed.), Sociological methodology. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

¹⁵ Turner, C.F., & Martin, E. (1984). Surveys of subjective phenomena, Vol. 1. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Respondents had two important memory tasks in this survey. They had to remember any "missing child" event and they had to remember whether it occurred within the bounds of the time period. A number of design features assisted in this task.

First, we expected the nature of the subject matter to assist in recall. We were asking about events that were likely to be salient (as opposed to asking people, for example, if they had bought shoelaces). And even if not salient, we were asking about a subject that should have been of interest to caretakers, so that people usually were willing to put a serious effort into trying to recall events.

Second, we gave them a variety of cues and a number of opportunities to search their memories so that even if initially they drew a blank, there was some chance that, in the course of answering the screeners, they would recollect a relevant episode.

Our choice of a 1-year timeframe also reflects our effort to minimize memory problems. A 1-year timeframe strikes a middle course between the two memory problems. Shorter timeframes make it more likely that an event will be recalled, but also exacerbate errors in locating the event within or outside the specific timeframe. One year is still short enough that most significant events will be remembered, yet long enough to minimize the errors in temporal location.

Moreover, respondents were asked about the time of occurrence on two separate occasions: first in response to the screener, and

then again when more detailed information was gathered. Interviewers were carefully trained about how to help respondents use seasonal cues to situate events during the year.

Candor

Besides memory, the findings of the survey are heavily dependent on respondent candor. If respondents failed to disclose many episodes, the accuracy of our estimates could be jeopardized. It is easy to imagine many reasons why caretakers may not have wished to divulge an episode. A family whose child had suffered a kidnapping might be legitimately reticent about calls from anonymous individuals. A family whose child had run away might be embarrassed about the event.

Interestingly, as a general rule, people's candor in anonymous surveys has turned out to be far greater than many social scientists and lay people once believed possible.¹⁶ In recent years, anonymous telephone surveys have gathered a great deal of information about extremely sensitive subjects: rape, child abuse, wife abuse, contraception, drug use, and homosexual behavior.

The candor in these kinds of studies seems to emanate from a number of factors. First, people are often flattered to be included in a scientific study on social issues. Second, people want to be helpful, as long as it does not require too much time or effort. Third, people appear to trust the anonymity of the survey interview situation. Fourth, people seem to yearn to have

¹⁶ Gelles, R.J. (1979). Methods for studying sensitive family topics. In R.J. Gelles (Ed.), Family violence. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

somebody to whom they can talk about themselves and their families, as long as it puts them in no jeopardy.

Nonetheless, prior research does show that some people do omit information about themselves that they believe puts them in a bad light, a phenomenon called "social desirability bias." In this survey, we took a number of steps to help minimize this bias.

First, in introducing the study, we emphasized its importance, and tried to connect it to concerns with which respondents could clearly identify: "children's safety."

Second, we clearly explained the fact that the respondents had been called at random, that we did not know their names or addresses, that the whole interview was anonymous and confidential and their telephone numbers would be erased after the interview process was completed.

Third, interviewers were selected to have normal voice qualities and trained to use tones that were friendly, confidential and concerned. Interviewers were also selected for their maturity and instructed to sound interested and supportive and to avoid expressing judgment, alarm, or surprise.

Fourth, we tried to avoid the use of loaded words such as "kidnapped" or "thrown away."

Fifth, we used a desensitizing technique in structuring the interview. In this technique, respondents are gradually led from more general and nonthreatening questions to more detailed and sensitive questions, which allowed rapport and confidence to develop between the respondent and the interviewer. Thus, we asked respondents to tell us about the children in the household, their

first names, ages, races, and so forth before we asked any questions about possible missing events. We also generally ordered the episode screener questions so that those events where the respondent would clearly be blameless (e.g., a child was taken by someone) would be asked before those where the respondent might have some culpability in the situation (e.g., having asked or told a child to leave the household).

We believe that these techniques minimized the number of respondents who withheld information about episodes from the interviewers.

Weighting

One of the statistical procedures used extensively in this study was weighting. Weighting gives some cases a greater or lesser influence than others in arriving at total counts and percentages. Weighting is employed for a variety of purposes: for example, to adjust for different probabilities of selection or to correct for certain expected distortions or defects in the sample.

In this study, weights were used to deal with a number of issues. They were used to compensate for the omission of households without telephones. They were used to compensate for the fact that some households with more than one telephone number had an extra chance of being included. Weights adjusted for the fact that some eligible households declined to participate. Finally, and most important, it was through weighting that we could use the information on the thousands of children in our sampled households as a basis for making inferences about the more than 63

million children in the United States as a whole. More information on weighting procedures is available in the Household Survey Methodology report.

Juvenile Facilities Survey

The Juvenile Facilities Survey was designed to take account of a serious limitation of the Household Survey in regard to the problem of runaways. Although most children live in households, some live in juvenile facilities like boarding schools, group foster homes,¹⁷ and juvenile detention centers for part or all of the year. Although this number is small, it is widely recognized that such children run away much more often and constitute perhaps as many as half of the repeat runaways who came to police attention.¹⁸ A survey of households will not necessarily count this potentially important group of children.

To approximate a random sample of juvenile residential facilities, we asked all respondents in the Household Survey if they or other adults in the household had children who would ordinarily live in the household, but for some reason "lived in some type of facility such as a boarding school, hospital or juvenile facility for at least 2 consecutive weeks during the last 12 months?" If they had, we asked for the name of the juvenile facility and an address, location or phone number so that we could

¹⁷ Family foster homes were included in Household Survey.

¹⁸ Heron, R. (1987). Runaway children: A police perspective. Paper presented at the Covenant House Symposium on Street Youth, Toronto, Ontario, November 2-4. See also, Fisher, J. (1989). Missing children research project vol 1: A focus on runaways. Ottawa: Solicitor General Canada.

contact the institution. Thus a juvenile residential facility in our sample had a probability of being nominated in proportion to the number of children from telephone households in the facility. (One distortion in this sample is its underrepresentation of juvenile facilities that cared for orphans, abandoned, or refugee children who would not have households in the community to nominate them. Another distortion came from the underrepresentation of institutions whose children came from households without telephones.)

The questions recruiting institutions into the Juvenile Facilities Study came rather late in the questionnaire, and so were affected by some breakoffs. Of the 34,820 households with or without children, the question about whether they had a child in an institution was actually asked of a total of 28,822 or 82.8 percent. Four hundred households claimed to have one or more children residing in a facility for 2 or more weeks. In 82 of these cases, however, respondents either refused to give information, did not know the name or location, or misunderstood the intent of the question, leaving a response rate of 79.5 percent.

Three-hundred twenty-six juvenile facilities were nominated by households in our sample. Note that in addition to boarding schools and correctional facilities, there were many summer camps, mental health treatment centers and general hospitals (children who had been sick for extended periods), as well as colleges and the military. We decided to exclude colleges and the military from the

Juvenile Facilities Survey, because enrollment in college or the military is generally considered a sign of emancipation.

We made extensive efforts to find addresses or phone numbers for all other nominated facilities. We used phone directories, and national and local directories of summer camps, boarding schools, and correctional institutions. We contacted State child welfare departments and licensing authorities for additional information on group foster homes, chambers of commerce for information on schools; national camping associations; national religious associations; the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts for information on camps and State park services; and the Job Corps for information on work camps and the like.

Each juvenile facility was contacted by phone and an official was interviewed or sent a questionnaire to fill out. The questionnaire asked for information about the institution, such as the number of children in residence, whether it was a closed facility, and the number of children who had run away from the facility during the last year. To gather detailed information about the episodes, the questionnaire asked about the five children who had run away most recently in 1988.

Table JFS-1. Recruitment of Juvenile Facilities

		# Facilities
Unique facilities nominated		326 ^a
Non-eligible (e.g., college) or out-of scope (e.g., not residential)	140	
Eligible		186
Insufficient or wrong name, location Located	35	151
Non response Completed	24	127

^a These 326 represented a total of 363 nominations from 289 households. Some facilities were nominated two or more times, and some households nominated more than one unique facility.

Out of a total of 326 nominated facilities, 186 or 57 percent were classified as eligible (Table JFS-1). Of the eligible, 35 or 19 percent had an insufficient name or address or were not locatable. Of those we could locate, 24 could not be persuaded to cooperate. We ultimately obtained completed questionnaires from 127, 84 percent of those we could locate or 68 percent of those that were eligible. The participation rates were highest for group homes, boarding schools, and schools for the physically and mentally disabled and lowest for medical facilities (Table JFS-2).

Table JFS-2. Participation Rate by Type of Juvenile Facility

	# Eligible & Located	# Completed	Participation Rate
Camps	59	49	83%
Group Homes	9	9	100%
Boarding Schools	13	13	100%
Juvenile Correctional Institutions	7	6	91%
Mental Health Facilities	27	22	81%
Medical Hospital	19	12	63%
Schools for Physically / Mentally Disabled	8	8	100%
Drug / Abuse Rehabilitation Facilities	9	8	89%
Total	151	127	84%

The 127 juvenile facilities that participated represent thousands of such facilities nationwide and an estimated 955,000 children who resided there during all or part of 1988. Table JFS-3 illustrates some of the characteristics of these juvenile facilities. The largest group was summer camps (32%). The South was the region with the most facilities, the West with the least. Over 10 percent of the facilities were quite large with over 700 children in residence. The average length of stay for almost one-third was less than 1 month, undoubtedly reflecting the large number of camps. But 40 percent reported average stays in excess of 6 months.

Table JFS-3. Selected Characteristics of Juvenile Facilities

Facility Characteristics	% (N=117)
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Type of Residential Facility

Camp	32%
Group Foster Home	13%
Boarding School	12%
Juvenile Correctional Center	1%
Mental Health Facility	22%
Medical Hospital	3%
Schools for Physically/Mentally Handicapped	6%
Drug/Abuse Rehabilitation Facilities	11%

Region of Country

Northeast	29%
South	35%
Midwest	20%
West	16%

Size of Facility (Number of children
under age of 18 who resided there
in 1988)

1 - 100	29%
101 - 300	35%
301 - 700	25%
701 - 1500	10%
1501 & over	1%

Average Length of Stay

Less than 1 month	30%
1 to 6 months	30%
7 to 12 months	30%
More than a year	10%

This survey of runaway episodes from juvenile facilities is the first such systematic and national study, and does provide a

major supplement to previous surveys,¹⁹ which were based entirely on the experiences of households. However, some important limitations to this study should be noted.

First, unlike surveys of households, national surveys of institutions are less common and do not have the same refined methodologies. For example, there is no listing or census of the full population of juvenile residential facilities from which to select a sample. The way we went about finding our sample probably underrepresented certain kinds of institutions, especially those whose child populations do not tend to come from households. With no list or formal census of such institutions, we do not have any way of knowing how many we missed or of correcting the problem statistically. This is further complicated by the fact that a fifth of households with eligible children did not nominate facilities and a third of eligible nominated facilities could not be located or interviewed.

Second, the quality of the information we got from juvenile facilities may not be as good as the information from households. True, many institutions can refer to their written records in looking for runaway episodes. But some of the surveyed institutions had hundreds of children in residence, and some had relatively large numbers of runaways. Officials may not have remembered or may not have documented some episodes. When we requested detailed information on the five most recent runaway children, some officials simply gave us five that they remembered.

¹⁹ Opinion Research Corporation (1976). National statistical survey on runaway youth. Washington, DC: Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office of Human Development.

Finally, there were some statistical problems. Children who live in residential facilities do not necessarily live there for the entire year. In fact, many children go to boarding schools, camps, or hospitals for only a portion of the year and reside in a household for the rest. This means that since we had conducted both a household and a residential facility survey we ran the risk of counting the same child twice in our estimates if that child had run away from both a household and an institution. We have an imprecise correction for this: we asked whether a given child who had run away from a facility had also run away from a household or another institution in the study year. But because this was second-hand information and of relatively low reliability, we probably have not eliminated all duplicate counting.

Returned Runaway Study

The Returned Runaway Study was a methodological study checking a possible limitation of the Household Survey. All the information in the Household Survey on the experiences of children was obtained from parents and other caretakers. However, it is very possible that some parents did not know about runaway episodes or had distorted information about them. The runaway children, who almost certainly were alienated to some degree from their parents, may not have told parents all the details of the episode. Another possibility is that some parents may have told us that their children had run away, when the children did not see it that way. In both instances, the children may have had their own perspective on what was, in many cases, an issue of dispute with their parents.

A feasibility study²⁰ suggested that getting this perspective from children was possible. The intent of the Returned Runaway Study was to interview children to find out whether their accounts differed in important respects from accounts provided by their parents.

The sample for the Returned Runaway Study was constituted from the Household Survey. If a parent from the survey reported that a child had run away and returned, we asked if we could have permission to talk to the child at some other time. A complication in this strategy arose when we realized that some of the households that were initially screening into the study as having Throwaway episodes were, in fact, meeting our definition for Runaway episodes. When we recognized this complication at the halfway point of data collection, we enlarged recruitment for the Returned Runaway Study by requesting permission to follow up on returned children who screened in as either Runaways or Throwaways. In addition, some of the children who screened in turned out to have been involved in episodes that did not for one reason or another ultimately qualify under our definitional criteria as either Runaways or Throwaways. Thus, our returned runaway sample consisted of youth who had episodes that were subsequently classified as Runaways, Attempted Runaways, Throwaways, Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing, and nothing at all. Nonetheless,

²⁰ Sudman, S., Cowan, C., Blair, J., & Khodadadi, K. (n.d.). Op. cit.

we will refer to this group by the shorthand term of "returned runaways."

As a comparison group to the returned runaways, we also sought to recruit youth whose parents had reported no runaway or throwaway episode at all. We wanted to use this group, in part, to determine if some children had indeed run away, even though their parents had reported no such episode. And we also wanted to use this group to examine the question of why some youth run away when others do not. To constitute this sample, we asked a random sample of parents who had children 12 or older and who had reported no episode relevant to the survey (including abductions) for permission to interview their children.

To promote participation by the children, we called back and asked for the children directly at a different time, explained the study, and asked for their participation. Children were sometimes hard to reach, but we made up to 29 callbacks in attempts to include them in the survey. Except in instances where the parents granted permission only on condition that they listen in on the interview, we asked the young respondents to make sure they had complete privacy before continuing with the interview. In only three cases did parents actually listen in. We tried to be very sensitive in talking with the adolescents by wording questions simply and directly and allowing for a number of open-ended responses. The interviewers themselves were primarily young people (between the ages of 18 and 22) who had both telephone interviewing experience and a strong interest in child welfare issues.

Obviously, not all parents gave permission and not all the children could be contacted or were willing to talk. Table RR-1 shows that, of 184 recruited runaways, we were able to complete interviews with 85. In a little over one-third of the recruitments, the parents would not give us permission. In 11 percent of the cases we could never contact the child, and in 7 percent the child or parent refused the interview at the time of recontact. The completion rate was 46 percent of all recruitments and 87 percent of all children we were able to contact. As might be expected, we fared better with the comparison children. Of the 200 recruited comparison children we were able to complete interviews with 142. The completion rate of those recruited was 71 percent and of those contacted was 95 percent.

Table RR-1. Classification of Household Contacts and Completion Rates in Returned Runaway Study

Classification	Episode	Nonepisode
Asked parent for permission to interview child	184	200
Granted permission by parent to interview child	118	162
Completed interview with child	85	142
Did not complete interview with child	33	20
<u>Reasons for Not Completing Interviews</u>		
<u>Unable to contact child</u>		
Telephone disconnected/moved left no new number/wrong number	11	8
Child ran away/left home	6	3
Child in household, but could not reach	1	1
Child in jail/institution	2	0
<u>Refusal</u>		
By child	10	3
Parent changed his/her mind	3	5
<u>Completion Rates</u>		
<u>Completed Interviews</u> of number of households asked permission	46%	71%
<u>Completed Interviews</u> of number of households that granted permission	71%	88%
<u>Completed Interviews</u> of number of children contacted (Granted permission - unable to contact)	87%	95%

The sample covered a spectrum of children, as shown in Table RR-2. There were about equal numbers of males and females. Ages ranged from 12 to 17. About one in six was nonwhite. The runaway and nonrunaway samples were equivalent in gender and race, but the runaways were older and more likely to come from single, step-parent and foster families.

There were certain important limitations in the methodology of the Returned Runaway Study. First, the study did not include perhaps the most important group of children: those who had not returned. Their experience was certainly different from those who did return. It is possible that the returnees had shorter episodes, a more stable home, and a better relationship with their parents. Thus, we might expect these parents and children to have given more similar accounts of events. We cannot extrapolate from this study to the accuracy of information from the parents of children who had not returned.

Second, even among the runaways who returned, we were missing a sizable sector. The completion rate of 46 percent among the returned runaways meant that we failed to talk with over half the eligible youngsters. The group we missed was probably different in some ways, perhaps more alienated, perhaps more at odds with their parents. Readers need to keep this in mind.

Table RR-2. Selected Characteristics of Children Who Participated in the Returned Runaway Study (Both Runaways and Nonrunaways)

Child Characteristics	Runaway Subsample % (N=85)	Nonrunaway Subsample % (N=142)
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	52%	58%
Female	48%	42%
<u>Age of Child</u>		
12-13 years	10%	35%
14-15 years	22%	23%
16-17 years	68%	42%
<u>Race of Child</u>		
Black, not Hispanic	12%	9%
White, not Hispanic	81%	84%
Hispanic	2%	3%
Other	5%	4%
<u>Family Composition</u>		
Both natural/adoptive parents present	37%	66%
Step-parent family	24%	13%
Single-parent family	23%	15%
Other family arrangements	10%	6%
Foster care	6%	0%
<u>Did Parent Request To Listen in on Child Interview?</u>		
Yes	6%	13%
No	94%	87%
<u>Did Parent Actually Listen in on Child Interview?</u>		
Yes	1%	1%
No	99%	99%

Finally, even among those with whom we did talk we need to be cautious in assuming that they were candid. By this we do not mean to reinforce what we consider to be the unfounded prejudice that children are inherently unreliable informants. But the children did have possible reasons to mistrust the study. We had interviewed their parents first. They were talking to us from their parents' home. And we were asking them about information that could possibly get them in trouble with their parents. If they simply endorsed their parents' version of events, it might have been understandable.

Nonetheless, this study does break new ground in offering both the perspective of parents and children about episodes that are open to multiple interpretations.

Police Records Study

The Police Records Study (PRS) was a survey of police records in a nationally representative sample of law enforcement agencies to estimate the number of non-family abductions that were known to law enforcement. In agreement with recommendations made prior to NISMART by consultants to OJJDP we, too, were concerned that non-family abductions, especially the more serious cases, might not occur frequently enough to be reliably counted through the Household Survey. This turned out to be the case. Although we asked questions to elicit possible reports from caretakers about non-family abductions, too few episodes were disclosed to calculate a valid estimate. So we sought a systematic national survey of police records, in which we anticipated, correctly, that we could

obtain enough cases to derive a reliable incidence estimate and profile information.

In a first stage, we selected a nationally representative sample of 21 counties in 16 different States using a method that guaranteed representation of all regions of the country and all levels of urbanization (these counties, which included Los Angeles, Cook County (Chicago), and the Borough of Manhattan, contained 13 percent of the total and 10 percent of the child population of the United States). Then, within each county, we recruited State police, county sheriff, and municipal police departments that had jurisdiction and maintained files on criminal offenses. When there were more than five municipal police agencies in a county, we took a sample of five. In some counties, there were fewer than five agencies that qualified. Details concerning county and agency sampling methods are given in the report on Police Study Methodology.

Ultimately, a total of 83 agencies in the 21 counties were found to have files on the types of cases in which we were interested. A breakdown of these agencies by type, by region, and by degree of urbanization of the county is provided in Table PRS-1. All the selected agencies agreed to participate in the study, yielding the remarkably high participation rate of 100 percent.

Table PRS-1. Types and Regional Distribution of Law Enforcement Agencies

%

(N=83)

<u>Type of Agency</u>	
Municipal police	73%
County sheriff	20%
State police	7%

<u>Region of Country</u>	
Northeast	25%
South	30%
North Central	27%
West	18%

<u>Size of County</u>	
Very large metropolitan county	41%
Metropolitan	46%
Nonmetropolitan	13%

The major challenge for this study was to identify abduction cases in what were frequently voluminous police records. Unfortunately, police agencies do not generally keep a separate file in which they store all cases involving abductions. Many abductions (in the sense covered by our definition of Legal Definition Abductions) occur in conjunction with other crimes, such as homicide and rape. Our exploratory discussions with law enforcement officials, criminologists, and missing children's advocates, as well as one previous police records study of child abduction,²¹ indicated that four general types of crime

²¹ National Center on Missing and Exploited Children (1986). An evaluation of the crime of kidnapping as it is committed against children by non-family members. Washington, DC: National Center

classifications would contain most of the reported cases involving non-family abductions: abduction, missing persons, homicides and sexual assaults. Even within these broad categories, however, agencies can be idiosyncratic in the terminologies they use. So discussions were conducted with each police agency to find out just where their abduction cases might be found. Table PRS-2 contains a list of the possible file names that were to be included in the search.

for Missing and Exploited Children.

Table PRS-2. Possible File Names for Eligible Records

Sex Offense

Rape / forcible rape
Child sexual abuse
Sex assault (of offense)
Child abuse
Indecent liberties
Buggery
Sodomy (or crime against nature)
Crimes against children
Attempts to commit any of the above

Abduction

Child abduction
Kidnapping
Stranger abduction
Nonfamily abduction
Unlawful restraint
Unlawful detainment
Missing persons - juvenile
Missing persons - adult (if age cutoff is under 18)
Missing persons - involuntary
Missing persons - unknown (unknown whether voluntary or involuntary)

Homicide

Murder
Nonnegligent manslaughter
Manslaughter by negligence
Feticide
Unknown dead

In our preliminary contacts with the participating police departments, it also became clear that, while a survey of homicide, abduction, and missing persons files would be relatively straightforward, sex offenses records would pose a significant problem for the time and budget constraints of the study. In many jurisdictions, sex offense cases were handled by more than one division, so multiple file systems would have to be searched.

Moreover, the relevant files were typically very large and heterogeneous, including many types of records that were outside the scope of the study (e.g., voyeurism, indecent exposure, offenses perpetrated by family members, etc.). For these reasons, we decided to limit the survey of sex offense records to 4 of the 21 study counties (i.e., in two large, one medium size, and one small county). Combined, these four counties contained almost 5 percent of the nation's child population.²² This was a large enough database to provide some empirical grounds for suggesting the extent to which abductions that get classified solely as sexual offenses might augment the overall estimates. Because the records came from only four counties, however, it precluded developing an unbiased national estimate with known reliability of the number of non-family abductions that get classified only as sexual offenses. This meant that, strictly speaking, the only Police Record Study estimates of known reliability were those based strictly on the files of abductions, homicides and missing persons.

For some law enforcement agencies in small and medium size counties, it could be determined in a preliminary phone call that the agencies had no cases eligible for the study. If there were six or fewer eligible cases, data were collected over the phone. Where there were files with more than six eligible cases, trained researchers went to the agency, read through the case files, and abstracted the needed information from the case records onto a

²² U.S. Bureau of Census (1989). County and City Data Book, 1988, Table B. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

study data form. When eligible files contained more than 100 cases, cases were sampled for the study.

Cases from the police records went through a screening at two levels. The researchers abstracting the cases applied various eligibility criteria to decide whether the case should even be abstracted. Then, the finished abstract forms were later evaluated according to the study's strict definitional criteria.

These were the eligibility criteria that determined whether a case was even abstracted. Cases must have been reported between August 1, 1987, and July 31, 1988. The victim had to be under 18 years of age at the time of the incident. The perpetrator needed to be a non-family member and, (except for victims of homicide who may be discovered far from their county of residence) the victim had to have resided in the study county at the time of the incident. All unfounded reports were excluded from the study and, in those counties where sex offense records were examined, reports on offenses with no physical contact (such as voyeurism, indecent exposure, or child pornography) were also excluded.

There were a total of 1,259 homicide, abduction, and missing person cases reviewed by abstractors in the 21 study counties. Of these, fewer than half (511) actually met the criteria that allowed them to be abstracted. In the four counties where sex offense records were examined, there were 1,566 sex offense cases reviewed. Of these, fewer than one-fifth (313) actually turned out to be eligible for abstracting. Thus, a total of 2,825 case files were reviewed in police files, and 824 of these warranted complete study data forms. All data forms were sent to Westat headquarters where

they were evaluated according to the study definitional criteria of Non-Family Abduction.

The Police Records Study has several limitations that should be borne in mind. First, as a study of cases officially reported to police agencies, it automatically excluded all the cases that went unreported. Other studies²³ have shown that many serious sex offenses are never reported to the police. So it is likely that some unknown number of sex offenses, and possibly also some abductions and missing persons cases, went unreported in the jurisdictions served by participating agencies in this study. This means that the estimate here, which is based on the cases known to these agencies, underestimates the true incidence of Non-Family Abduction to an unknown degree.

Second, some abductions may have been missed because they occurred in conjunction with crimes that were not systematically included in this study. For example, some robberies might also have involved abductions, but would not have been counted if they were not filed in the police records in abduction, missing persons, homicide or sexual assault files. It is possible that as many as 20 percent of abductions may be filed in such miscellaneous files.²⁴

²³ According to the National Crime Victimization studies only 50% of the rapes occurring to 12-19 year olds in 1987 were reported to the police, and only 52% of the aggravated assaults with weapons. Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1987. Bureau of Justice Statistics NCJ-115524. Russell's survey found only 6% of extrafamilial sexual abuse of children was reported to the police. Diana Russell (1984). Sexual Exploitation. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1984.

²⁴ National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (1986). An evaluation of the crime of kidnapping as it is committed against children by non-family members. Washington, DC: National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Third, some abductions may have been missed because police reports were too sketchy. Police records are not necessarily thorough or detailed, nor are they designed to address the issues that were important to this study. When police investigate and record a sexual assault or homicide, they do not necessarily write down information that we needed in order to decide whether an abduction occurred according to our definitions. So an abduction within our definition may have occurred, but the record may have lacked the information needed to lead us to count it.

Finally, we should caution about the use of data from the sexual offense files for making estimates. Due to limitations on resources, these files were only surveyed in 4 of the 21 counties. Thus, estimates based on them are of unknown bias and reliability.

FBI Data Reanalysis

The purpose of the FBI Data Reanalysis study was to estimate the number of children who were murdered in the course of a stranger abduction. This is a small, but very important and understandably frightening part of the abduction problem. The challenge of this study was that national homicide figures are not kept in a form that makes it easy to determine whether an abduction occurred together with the killing.

At the same time, national figures on homicide are better than those for any other crime. For homicides, the FBI obtains details from local police that are not currently²⁵ available for other

²⁵ There are currently plans to implement a National Incidence-Based Reporting System for other crimes. U.S. Department of Justice. (1988). Uniform Crime Reporting: National Incident

crimes, such as the relationship of the victim and the offender, and the age of the victim. This information is made available to researchers as the Supplemental Homicide Report (SHR).

Unfortunately, the SHR does not specifically note whether the homicide was associated with an abduction. What the SHR does note is a variety of "circumstances" that describe the context or the precipitating event in which the homicide took place (e.g., robbery, burglary, arson, lover's triangle). The full list of possible circumstance "codes" is detailed in Table SHR-1.

Table SHR-1. Circumstance Codes Used to Classify Homicides in FBI's Supplemental Homicide Report

Circumstance

* Rape	Argument over money/property
Robbery	Other arguments
Burglary	Gangland killing
Larceny	Juvenile gang killing
Motor vehicle theft	Institutional killing
Arson	Sniper attack
Prostitution & commercial vice	Victim shot in hunting accident
* Other sexual offense	Gun cleaning death
Narcotic drug law	Children playing with gun
Gambling	Other gun negligence
* Other felony type	All other manslaughter by negligence
Abortion	Other non-felony type
Lover's triangle	* All suspected felony type
Child killed by babysitter	Felon killed by private citizen
Brawl due to influence of alcohol	Felon killed by police
Brawl due to influence of narcotic	* Undetermined

* Categories used in the calculation of possible abduction homicides by strangers

Based Reporting System. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Although the circumstance codes could not be used to specify the exact number of stranger abduction homicides, they could be used to draw an upper limit on the possible number of such crimes. Cases could be eliminated where their circumstance codes suggested that they were very unlikely to involve an abduction, leaving only homicides where an abduction was possible. Cases involving, for example, arson, larceny, alcoholic brawls, or lover's triangles were excluded (see Table SHR-1). This left homicides that occurred in conjunction with rape, other sex offenses, other felonies, other suspected felonies, or where circumstances were not determinable.

The study had to deal with a number of other problems with the SHR data. First, reporting agencies occasionally fail to submit monthly reports to the FBI. Second, there is a sizable amount of missing data, particularly on the crucial question of victim-offender relationship. Both of these problems could lead to severely mistaken estimates. The study applied statistical corrections developed in earlier work²⁶ to the data to compensate for these problems.²⁷

Finally, stranger abduction homicides, because they are relatively rare events, can fluctuate by relatively large percentages from year to year. Since the FBI maintains data for every year, it seemed wise to make estimates based on the average for a series of years grouped together. Thus, the estimates in

²⁶ Williams, K. & Flewelling, R. (1987). Family, acquaintance, and stranger homicide: Alternative procedures for rate calculations. Criminology, 25, 543-560.

²⁷ These corrections deal with some of the problems raised by researchers such as Maxfield. Maxfield, M. (1989). Circumstances in supplementary homicide reports: Variety and validity. Criminology, 27, 671-695.

this report are not for 1988. They represent an average for the years 1976-1987. Data for 1988 were not available in time for this study.

Community Professionals Study

The Community Professionals Study was intended to compensate for another limitation of the Household Survey methodology. It was anticipated that it would be difficult to gather information on certain kinds of Throwaway children through interviews with parents. Parents who had abandoned children or rejected their parental responsibility might not acknowledge their previous guardianship of these children, admit that they had forced the children out of their homes, or describe the circumstances under which these children were "thrown away."

The Community Professionals Study was an attempt to estimate the number of children who had been abandoned, rejected, and thrown away by counting such children who were known to a national sample of community agencies. The study took advantage of the fact that this type of action toward a child falls under the definition of child neglect. Determining the national incidence of child neglect had been the objective of a recent study completed in 1986 by one of the investigators in the NISMART project. By canvassing the database from this previous study, the second National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-2), for cases that met the current study's definition of a throwaway child, we were able to develop an estimate of the incidence of throwaway children that did not rely on parents' self reports.

The NIS-2 methodology^{28,29} is very similar to that used in the Police Records Study. A nationally representative sample of 29 counties in 19 States was chosen in a way to guarantee full representation of counties in different regions and different levels of urbanization. Within these counties, agencies were identified that might know of cases of child abuse and neglect. All county child protection agencies, sheriff's, juvenile probation, and public health departments were included in the study, as well as a systematic sample of schools, day care centers, hospitals, municipal police departments, mental health agencies, and social service agencies. Overall, 88.9 percent of the 827 targeted agencies agreed to participate in the study, the lowest rate being for schools (82.1%) and the highest for child protective services, public health, and hospitals (100%, 100%, and 96.2%, respectively).

The goal was to gather data on any case of child abuse and neglect that came to the attention of staff in each participating agency during a 3-month period in the fall of 1986. Key personnel within each agency were trained as "sentinels" to be on the lookout for the kinds of cases relevant to the study. Participating staff completed a data form on each case, and submitted these to the researchers. Trained evaluators then compared the information on

²⁸ Sedlak, A. (1988). Study findings: Study of national incidence and prevalence of child abuse and neglect: 1988. Washington, DC: Department of Health and Human Services.

²⁹ Sedlak, A., & Alldredge, E-E. (1987). Study of the national incidence and prevalence of child abuse and neglect: Report on data collection. Rockville, MD: Westat, Inc.

the case against rigorous, objective standards of what cases would be counted in the study estimates of abuse and neglect.

For the purposes of NISMART, evaluators returned to the narrative information on a subset of the NIS data forms, and reassessed cases according to the special definitional criteria being used for throwaway children in the NISMART study. A complex weighting system was used, which reflected the sampling probability for the source, corrected for nonresponse, and made the estimates apply for a whole year rather than just 3 months. The cases that met the criteria for throwaway children were used to generate a national estimate.

The NIS-2 methodology was a sophisticated and complex one that benefited from the experience of a similar study done 6 years earlier with the same methodology.³⁰ Its principal limitation, in both estimates of child abuse and neglect, and estimates of Throwaways, is that it minimizes the full extent of the problem because it only includes cases that are known to community professionals. No one knows what proportion of all cases these are, but they could well be just a small fraction. For example, even in the most serious cases, such as the abandonment of small children, many of these episodes may be discovered and handled by relatives before community agencies become involved. In the case of older children who are kicked out of the house, the majority may never come to agency attention, because the children themselves

³⁰ Burgdorf, K. (1981). Study findings: National study of incidence and severity of child abuse and neglect. Washington, DC: Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

conspire to avoid agency entanglements. Thus, estimates based on data from the Community Professional Study are likely to give just a lower bound for the problem.

Definitions

One of the major goals of NISMART was to develop comprehensive and objective definitions that could be used in this and future research. Unfortunately, clear and widely accepted definitions have not been available for many of the phenomena of interest to this study. In fact, this lack of accepted definitions has been part of the reason for policy controversies.

In the developmental work done by OJJDP prior to NISMART, consultants strongly suggested the need for intensive work on definitions. There was a consensus that researchers needed to gather detailed descriptions of events from respondents or other sources against which to apply standard, objective criteria, rather than allowing respondents or data sources to define episodes themselves.

In the early portion of the project, we undertook a three-stage process for the development of definitions. First, we consulted State statutes, law review articles, prior research studies, and a panel of 34 experts knowledgeable about each of the phenomena of interest. Then, based on this information and these discussions, we drafted definitions. These draft definitions along with an extended rationale pertaining to them were then circulated to the original experts, who made comments and suggested changes. These comments and changes were then incorporated into the final

draft. Finally, definitions were tested against case material coming to the attention of the study in its preliminary stages, and further refinements were made.

The full text and rationales are available to interested readers as a separate document. However, some general comments on the definitions are warranted:

1) Definitional controversies were so endemic to each type of episode that it made sense to have multiple definitions. In some cases, the controversy was between a public image of a crime and the actual legal definition of that crime. For example, "abduction" in legal terms refers to a much broader class of events than those usually visualized by people who hear the term. In other cases, the controversy was between the views of families and those of public authorities. For example, to most families a child who runs away and is gone overnight is a serious crisis. But police know from experience that most such children return in 24 hours and are not in serious danger, so they have pressed for definitions of runaways that focus on those who are at risk for exploitation. For this reason, we have distinguished between Broad Scope episodes and Policy Focal episodes, with the latter referring primarily to the type that have been of most interest to police and policymakers (in all but the Non-Family Abduction category).

2) In developing the definitions we tried to take into account the complex meaning of some of the concepts. For example, a runaway may not simply be a child who leaves a note and is gone from home overnight. Runaways may also be children who are away with permission but choose not to come home when they are supposed

to. Moreover, whether these children should really be considered runaways may depend on their age. Thus, the definitions have multiple parts and qualifiers. The definitions are often more inclusive and more complex than the simple stereotyped images that people have in reaction to words like "runaway."

3) The final definitions, being quite complex, ultimately required decisions about matters where clearcut empirical guidance was lacking. The researchers had to use their best judgment and the consultation of the panel of experts. The rationales for many of these decisions are detailed in the report on definitions. Nonetheless, given the amount of controversy over definitional matters, there are certain to be readers who would disagree with these decisions or who would like to add new criteria or new definitions. The question of how to define the various concepts used here is still open. For this reason, we processed the data in such a way that they can be reanalyzed using other definitions. Some of the important subsequent analyses that will be carried out with these data concern the consequences and implications of using alternative definitions.

In all the NISMART studies except the FBI Data Reanalysis, the cases that were collected from respondents or from agency records were evaluated according to the study definitions. This "evaluative coding" phase was unusually detailed and complex for a study of this sort. The definitions were broken down into various component attributes, such as "gone overnight" or "involved concealment," etc. Specially trained evaluative coders examined all the information available on an episode, including transcribed

verbatim comments from respondents and marginal notes by interviewers, to see if the episode met each criterion. Whether the episode occurred within the study timeframe was evaluated in the same way. Complex decision rules were developed to handle episodes where some ambiguity existed. If an episode failed to qualify under one type of episode, for example as a Runaway, it might still be evaluated for inclusion under another type of episode, for example as a Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing child. This procedure gave a carefully standardized meaning to estimates that were derived from substantially different methodologies. It also insured substantial objectivity in deciding whether a case met the definitional criteria.

The Presentation of Findings

The following five chapters present the major findings of the study. Each chapter is devoted to a different type of episode. Within each chapter, incidence estimates are made for that type of episode, demographic comparisons are presented, and characteristics of the episode are profiled.

The incidence estimates and rates are based on weighting up to 1988 census estimates of approximately 63 million children under the age of 18. Because they are based on samples, each estimate and rate has a confidence interval, that is, a range within which the true number should fall 95 percent of the time a study of this size and design is done. The estimate we give in this report is the midpoint of the confidence interval. Confidence intervals can be found in Appendix I at the end of this document. This needs to

be kept in mind: the estimates given are much less precise than they may initially appear. An estimate of 210,000 may have a confidence interval from 150,000 to 270,000, within which we are 95 percent certain that the true number would fall.

Moreover, as we explained in the introduction, these incidence estimates cannot be added. The main reason for this is conceptual. But there are also methodological problems to any aggregation of figures. Our methodology was based on an assumption that we were trying to measure the incidence of five separate problems. Among other things, this meant that the same child could be counted in two or more categories. For example, if a child had run away at one point during the year and at another time was missing because of an accident, this child would be counted once in the incidence of Runaways and once in the incidence of Lost, Injured or Otherwise Missing. In fact, a rather large number of children, as explained in Chapter 6, had both Runaway and Throwaway episodes. Thus, any simple summation of incidence estimates will be misleading because some children will be counted twice.

In the section of each chapter on demographics, the demographic proportions for Broad Scope children are compared with those for the U.S. child population estimated from the entire sample. In any case where we describe the Broad Scope proportions as being different from the U.S. child population, the difference is statistically significant, unless otherwise stated, although no statistical tests are reported in the text.

In the section of each chapter on characteristics, the Broad Scope children (and the Legal Definition Non-Family Abductions) are

broken down into percentages based on questions that were asked about their episodes.³¹ Broad Scope (and Legal Definition Abduction) cases were used because the sample size for Policy Focal (and Stereotypical Kidnapping) cases was sometimes too small in some types of episodes for meaningful breakdowns to be made. More detailed breakdowns, where possible, will be reported in subsequent publications. No significance tests have been used in the discussion of characteristics.

In the sections on demographics and characteristics, many people will have the desire to translate percentages into raw numbers, for example, to try to convert the 4 percent Hispanic Runaways into 18,000 children. Although this may give a feel for the magnitudes involved, we caution people against giving credence to these conversions, using them publicly or, even worse, making them the basis of policy. Because they are based on very small numbers of actual cases, they are extremely imprecise, and the confidence interval for such numbers sometimes includes 0 and may go as high as ten times or more than the estimated figure.³² The only numerical totals (as opposed to percentages) that should be used from this report are those already calculated and given here. Any additional numbers need to be calculated from the data themselves, not from the percentages in the report.

³¹ Some children had experienced more than one episode that could be classified as Broad Scope in a given category during the previous year. When this happened, we selected only one of these episodes for the profile analysis, choosing the one that lasted longest, and if equally-long episodes were involved, the one with the most serious outcomes for the child.

³² By contrast, the estimated percentage is usually far more reliable, with a much narrower confidence interval.

This report will certainly generate as many questions as it answers. However, it represents only the first level of analysis for the NISMART data. Other, more detailed analyses and reports are planned from these data, and the data are publicly available for use by other researchers.

Chapter 3

FAMILY ABDUCTION

The term "Family Abduction" typically refers to a situation where a parent absconds with a child in the course of a divorce/custody dispute. But the problem, sometimes referred to as "child snatching," can take other forms as well. For example, grandparents have been known to take grandchildren when they disapproved of how they were being provided for or raised. For another example, after the State has placed a child in foster care, the parent will sometimes unlawfully grab the child back. And the recent notorious Baby M case, where a surrogate mother took back her child from the father and adoptive mother, is also an example of a non-divorce-related family abduction.

Attention to the problem of family abduction is a fairly recent phenomenon dating from the late 1970's and early 1980's.^{1,2,3} The increased attention would appear to stem from a number of major social changes.

First, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of divorces involving children. An estimated one million divorces involving over a million children now occur annually. The number has more than tripled between 1960 and the present.^{4,5,6}

¹ Agopian, M. (1981). Parental child stealing. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath Company.

² Demeter, A. (1977). Legal kidnapping. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

³ Moore, B. (1981). Parental child stealing takes its toll. Los Angeles Times, September 13, Part IV, 1.

⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1986). Advance report of final divorce statistics, 1984. Monthly Vital Statistics Report, 35(6), 1-16.

Second, the rise in divorce has been matched by an increase in the number of legal contests over custody or visitation. An estimated 15 percent of all divorces with children, 150,000 each year, entail such battles.⁷

Third, social attitudes and legal presumptions have been in the process of changing in regard to how custody should be allocated. For example, reflecting a reaction against the traditional presumption that mothers should get custody of children, by 1985, 30 States had adopted some form of joint custody legislation.⁸ This has encouraged fathers to believe they have greater custody rights in regard to their children, and to take actions, even if sometimes illegally, to enforce such claims.

Moreover, the geographic mobility in all segments of American society is enormous. So, divorced parents are less likely to remain in the same community with each other and their children. This increases their incentive to take or keep children in order to be able to see them regularly. It also enhances their ability to successfully foil recovery by virtue of being in another State or country.

⁵ Weitzman, L. (1985). The divorce revolution: The unexpected social and economic consequences for women and children in America. New York: Free Press.

⁶ Saluter, A. (1989). Singleness in America. In U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No. 162, Studies in Marriage and the Family. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

⁷ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1986). Advance report of final divorce statistics, 1984. Monthly Vital Statistics Report, 35(6), 1-16.

⁸ Weitzman, L. (1985), op. cit.

Family and parental abductions occur in many contexts with many motives.⁹ Parents flee with children prior to divorce decrees because of fears of losing custody. Parents unhappy with custody decisions abduct or refuse to return children after a permitted visitation. Parents go to courts in other jurisdictions and obtain contradictory custody awards, then flee with children to those jurisdictions. Some parents snatch a child because they discover, or have reason to fear, that the other parent is, or will soon be, physically or sexually abusing the child. In some cases, the predominant motive may not be a desire to have or to protect the child, but simply to retaliate against a still-hated ex-partner. In many other cases, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, and others get involved as allies or agents.

Relatively little social science research has been done concerning family abductions. Incidence estimates have been mostly speculative,^{10,11,12,13} and the one survey was flawed by a number of major methodological problems.¹⁴

Defining Family Abduction

Family abductions entail some serious definitional dilemmas. Perhaps most important, such situations revolve around complex

⁹ Agopian, M. (1981). Parental child stealing. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath Company.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Gill, J.E. (1981). Stolen children. New York: Seaview Books.

¹² Lewis, K. (1978). On reducing the snatching syndrome. Children Today, November-December, 19-35.

¹³ Moore, B. (1981). Parental child stealing takes its toll. Los Angeles Times, September 13, Part IV, 1.

¹⁴ Gelles, R. (1984). Parental child snatching: A preliminary estimate of the national incidence. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 46(3), 735-739.

competing claims. When one parent reports that a child has been abducted, the abductor often claims to just be enforcing his or her right, and that it is the first parent who had the child illegally. Or the second parent may contend that it is not an abduction, because the child is being protected from ongoing or potential abuse. In all likelihood, few abductors actually see themselves as "child snatchers."

A formal custody decree should be the final arbiter of who is right in such situations, but such decrees are subject to different interpretations and bitter legal wranglings that can take lawyers and judges years to sort out. As we mentioned, sometimes parents even obtain custody decrees from different States, with the decrees contradicting one another. Then again, many abductions occur prior to or in the absence of a formal custody decree. Here, it is even harder to determine who is in the right.

If courts and attorneys can disagree about the custody rights, how much more difficult is it for a researcher to make a determination? Moreover, since parents are hostile or in a state of incommunicado, it is not likely that two points of view are even available. Thus, to some extent, studies are forced to rely on the point of view of one party to a family abduction, with the realization that this may be a distorted claim. However, in this problem, researchers are not so different from police or missing children's agencies, which are also forced to rely at least initially on the claim of an aggrieved parent. But we want to be clear: In this study no effort was made to evaluate from an

independent point of view the claim of the aggrieved parent or to obtain the point of view of the abductor.

A second definitional problem concerns abductions by custodial parents. The most familiar and perhaps common kind of family abduction occurs when a parent who is deprived of custody, angry about the decision, abducts a child in violation of the decree. But noncustodial parents can also be deprived of their lawful visitation rights. A common example is the custodial parent who, in violation of a custody agreement, moves out of town with the children to take a job. Or, as in some recently publicized cases, the custodial parent, a native of some other country, may take the children and return to that country, thus depriving the noncustodial parent of rightful visitation. In this study we are counting abductions that deprive parental access to either the noncustodial or the custodial parent.¹⁵

There is a third important definitional issue. As in other missing child episodes, the actual legal definitions of parental abduction are sometimes a good deal broader than the kinds of cases that are of primary concern to policymakers. Parental abduction has been defined differently from State to State. But in some States the crime includes almost all intentional acts that deprive another parent of lawful custody. For example, California's criminal statutes define it to cover "every person who in violation of the physical custody or visitation provisions of a custody order, judgment or decree, takes, detains, conceals, or retains the child

¹⁵ However, only noncustodial parents who had the child in residence for 2 weeks during the last year would have been included.

with the intent to deprive another person of his or her rights to physical custody or visitation".¹⁶ Under this definition, to keep a child for an extra night in willful violation of a custody arrangement could be considered an abduction. (Note that the California statute applies equally to violations committed by custodial as well as noncustodial parents.) It is doubtful that many such short-term violations actually would be prosecuted. But for aggrieved parents such violations can be very frightening. For the affected children, the violations may be very traumatic.^{17,18} This is undoubtedly why such laws are broadly drawn.

So here, as in other kinds of episodes, we defined two types of family abduction to deal with the difference between what can be legally classified as a family abduction and what is of greatest concern to policymakers. Under our Broad Scope definition, a family abduction occurs 1) when a family member takes a child in violation of a custody agreement or decree; or 2) when a family member in violation of a custody agreement or decree fails to return or give over a child at the end of a legal or agreed upon visit, and the child is away at least overnight.

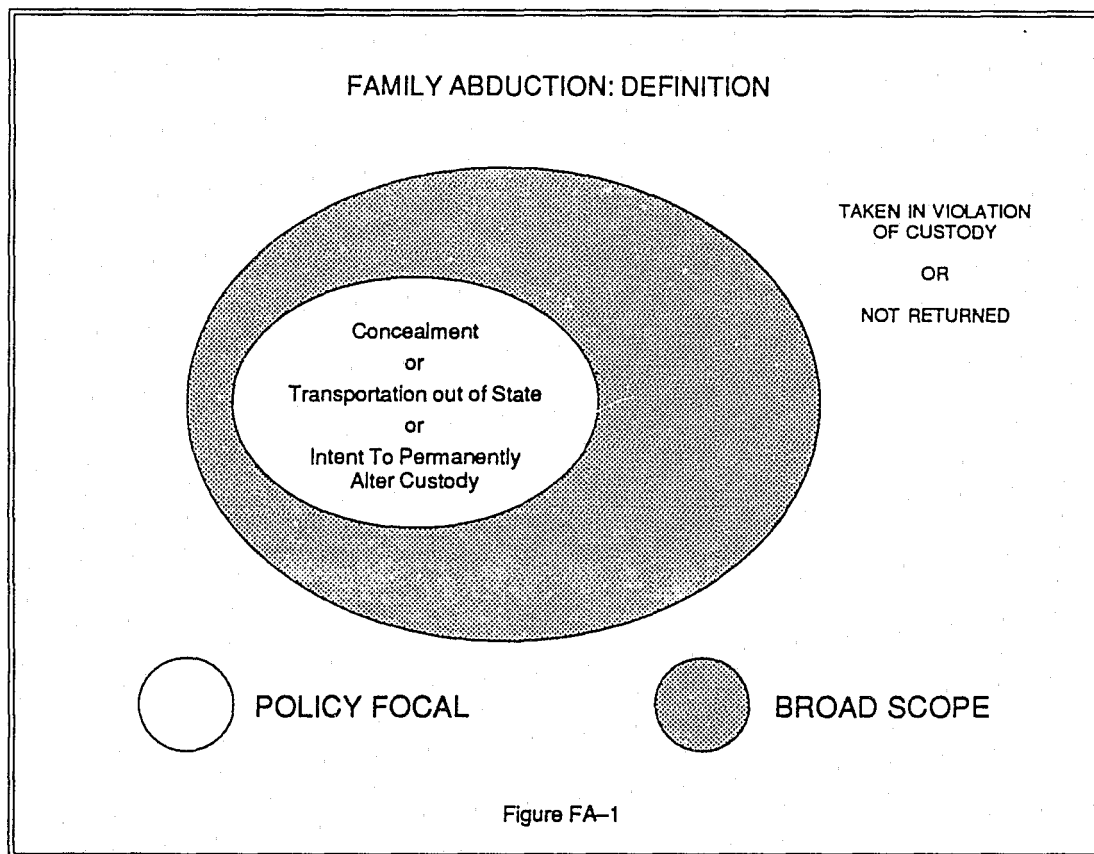
We defined a second, Policy Focal type of family abduction that includes only a subset of Broad Scope episodes that meet one of three other conditions (Figure FA-1):

¹⁶ California Penal Code, Chp 4 #278.5 pg 91.

¹⁷ Agopian, M. (1984). The impact on children of abduction by parents. Child Welfare, 63(6), 511-519.

¹⁸ Schetky, D., & Haller, L. (1983). Child psychiatry and law: Parental kidnapping. Journal of the American Academy of Child Psychiatry, 22(3), 279-285.

- 1) an attempt is made to conceal the taking or the whereabouts of the child and to prevent contact with the child; or
- 2) the child is transported out of State; or
- 3) there is evidence that the abductor had the intent to keep the child indefinitely or permanently affect custodial privileges.



These conditions each signal an abduction episode that is very serious and in which authorities, such as police, attorneys, or prosecutors are likely to be called into play.¹⁹

¹⁹ The Policy Focal Family Abduction also makes a distinction among episodes according to age in order to exclude instances in custody disputes where an older child wants to go live with a non-custodial parent and so conspires or cooperates to violate a decree or custodial arrangement. For children age 15 or older, Policy Focal cases require that there be some evidence of force or threat used to take or detain the child.

To reiterate, Family Abduction (Broad Scope) conforms to a more legal conception and includes many short-term violations of custody arrangements or decrees.

Family Abduction (Policy Focal) is closer to popular conceptions of "child snatching" and is limited to cases of concealment, transportation out of state, and intent to keep the child or alter custodial privileges.

Brief Review of Data Sources

The incidence estimates for family abduction come from the Household Survey portion of the NISMART studies (for more information see Chapter 2). In this national telephone survey, caretakers in 10,544 randomly selected households were asked about the experiences of 20,505 children age 18 or younger. The caretakers could have revealed a family abduction episode in response to any one of five questions:

"In the past 12 months, did any family member outside of your household, such as an ex-spouse, brother, sister, parent, or in-law, or someone acting for them, do any of the following things:

1) "Did any family member or someone acting for them take or try to take [any of these children] in violation of a custody order, agreement or other child living arrangement?"

2) "Did any family member outside of your household keep or try to keep [any of these children] from you when you were supposed to have [them] even if for just a day or weekend?"

3) "Did any family member conceal [any of these children] or try to prevent you from having contact with [them]?"

4) "Was there any time when anyone tried to take [any of these children] away against your wishes?"

5) "Has anyone ever kidnapped or tried to kidnap [any of these children]?"

If respondents answered yes to any of these screeners, details were obtained about the episode, and the definitional criteria of the study were applied to see if the episode met the definition of Family Abduction (or of some other type of episode).

There are several quite noteworthy strengths to this approach. First, the direct survey method allowed for the counting of many otherwise unreported family abduction episodes. It is acknowledged that police and courts do not hear about many abductions. For example, the aggrieved parent may terminate the abduction through the efforts of a private attorney and never contact police.

Second, the direct survey method obtained first-hand information from parents about the episode. In studies from police or court records, important information may be missing or mistaken. Among the most important missing information often is how the episode was resolved. Parents frequently fail to recontact police or missing children's networks after children are recovered.

Third, the direct survey method allowed for the application of systematic definitional criteria. Enough details could be gathered from the involved parent to see precisely whether the episode matched what we meant by a countable Broad Scope or Policy Focal Family Abduction.

Finally, by using multiple screening questions, parents were given multiple cues and multiple opportunities to be reminded of

episodes that may have occurred in the last year. Research shows that even serious criminal episodes may be forgotten over the course of a year especially if asked about with a single screening question.²⁰ One particular problem with recalling family abductions is that respondents may not have labeled this episode as a "kidnapping" or even as the "taking" of a child. The mention of ex-spouse or the mention of "concealment" may be the cue that reminds the respondent of the event.

The main drawback of the direct survey method is its reliance on the viewpoint of a single respondent. In some cases, respondents' versions of events may not be corroborated. Data culled from an alternative source, like police records, may provide additional information that helps to evaluate the situation. For example, the police record may show that the respondent, in spite of claims, did not have a valid custody decree at the time. But police records may introduce irrelevant or misleading biases, too, that do not clarify the facts of the case. Altogether, the direct survey method offers more strengths than weaknesses for arriving at an estimate of true incidence.

The Incidence Estimates

As shown in Table FA-1 and Figure FA-2, we estimate that in 1988 approximately 354,100 children experienced a Broad Scope Family Abduction. Of these, an estimated 163,200 children

²⁰ Martin, E., Groves, R., Matlin, J., & Miller, C. (1986). Report on the development of alternative screening procedures for the national crime survey. Washington, DC: Bureau of Social Science Research.

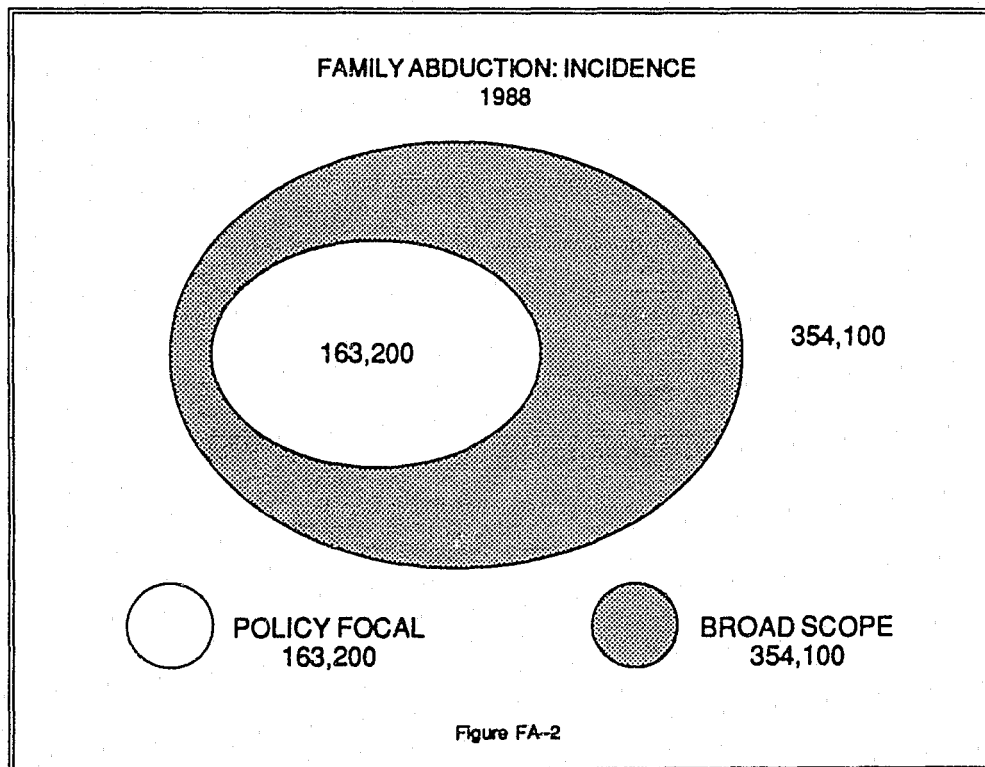
qualified under what we call a Policy Focal episode. The Policy Focal cases required concealment of the child, a removal across State boundaries, or an intent to permanently alter custodial privileges. In addition, there were 49,900 Attempted (but incomplete or failed) Family Abductions.

Table FA-1. Estimated National Incidence of Family Abductions, 1988

	Number of Children	Rate per 1,000 Children 0-17
Actual		
Broad Scope ^a	354,100	5.61
Policy Focal	163,200	2.59
Attempted ^b	49,900	.71

^a Includes Policy Focal

^b Not included in Broad Scope or Policy Focal



These are large numbers of Family Abductions, larger than many previous guesstimates, which placed the occurrence at 25,000 to 100,000.^{21,22,23} But they are certainly not implausible figures, when put into context. There are currently 10 million children who live with a mother or father who is separated or divorced.^{24,25} Close to half of all children can expect to experience the break up of their parents' marriage sometime in their childhood, and 1 in 10 can expect three such family transitions.²⁶ As we will note shortly, the period of vulnerability for a family abduction extends up to 4 or 5 years after a separation or divorce. With more than a million children experiencing parental divorce every year, there are anywhere from 5 to 10 million children in the risk pool for family abduction.

It should be no surprise, as well, that a large number of divorces provoke heated disputes about child custody. It is estimated that 10 to 15 percent of all custody arrangements are contested by one party or the other.²⁷ And even among uncontested custody situations, dissatisfaction runs high.²⁸

²¹ Agopian, M. (1981), op. cit.

²² McCoy, M. (1978). Parental kidnapping: Issues brief no. IB 77117. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Office.

²³ Moore, B. (1981), op. cit.

²⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1986), op. cit.

²⁵ Rawlings, S. (1989). Single parents and their children. In U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-23, No. 162, Studies in marriage and the family. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

²⁶ Furstenberg, F. Jr., Nord, C., Peterson, J., & Zill, N. (1983). The life course of children of divorce: Marital disruption and parental contact. American Sociological Review, 48, 656-668.

²⁷ Theonnes, N. (1989). Estimate based on information from court administrators in study of California, Colorado, Connecticut and Minnesota. Denver, CO: Center for Policy Research.

²⁸ Theonnes, N. (1985). Satisfaction with custody/visitation. Denver, CO: Center for Policy Research.

In this context, 354,100 Broad Scope and 163,200 Policy Focal Family Abductions are very plausible. In crude percentages, it might mean that between 3 and 7 percent of the 5 to 10 million children who have experienced a recent divorce are subject to a Broad Scope episode and 1 to 3 percent are subject to a Policy Focal one. Moreover, it must be remembered, as we indicated earlier, that not all family abductions are divorce-related.

These new estimates also are plausible in the light of earlier research. The most empirically based prior estimate of the number of family abductions was 459,000 to 751,000, based on a household survey conducted in 1982.²⁹ This study had a serious flaw, however, which undoubtedly led to an inflated figure: the single screening question asked of respondents--whether they had "any personal involvement in an incident of child snatching." There was no way of knowing whether the respondents who said yes were referring to their own child, or a sibling's child, or even a neighbor's child. The same child could have been the source of multiple reports in the survey (for example, by two or more parents, an in-law, a grandparent, a neighbor, and more). Thus the estimate is not of 459,000 to 751,000 individual, unduplicated children. Given this problem, many people believed the figures from Gelles' study were overestimates. We anticipated that estimates based on our more exact methodology and definitions would be lower, and in fact they are.

²⁹ Gelles, R. (1984), op. cit.

The Demographics of Family Abduction

There appeared to be a broad age range in the victims of family abduction (Table FA-2), with the highest percentages between ages 2 and 11. However, there is a gradual decline in the percentages as children grow older; older teenagers accounted for a quite low proportion of the victims, perhaps because at that age it is more often the teenagers' desires than those of their parents or caretakers that determine where they go. Young infants were also less subject to abduction, probably because these children require such intensive care.

The slow decline of percentages with age may mask an even greater disparity in actual risk. The older the children, the more likely they are to have experienced a parental divorce or separation.³⁰ Thus, there are more older than younger children in the "risk pool" for family abduction. If an equal percentage of 4- to 5-year-olds were abducted as 8- to 9-year-olds, it might in fact be evidence of a higher risk for the 4- to 5-year-olds because the risk pool is smaller for this group. This question deserves more detailed statistical analysis, however, than will be attempted here. Suffice it to say that relatively equal proportions of family-abducted children at different ages would not necessarily mean equal risk for those children.

³⁰ Furstenberg, F., Jr., Nord, C., Peterson, J., & Zill, N. (1983), op. cit.

Table FA-2. Age and Sex of Children Involved in
Broad Scope Family Abductions

	Family Abduction % (Unweighted N=142) (Weighted N=354,100)	U.S. Pop ^a %
Age		
0 - 1	6% ^b	10%
2 ^c - 3	18%	11%
4 ^c - 5	15%	11%
6 ^c - 7	13%	11%
8 ^c - 9	15%	10%
10 ^c - 11	14%	10%
12 ^c - 13	10%	10%
14 ^c - 15	7%	10%
16 ^c - 17 ^d	1% ^b	16%
Sex		
Boys	58%	51%
Girls	42%	49%

- ^a U.S. population figures are calculated from the Household Survey, not U.S. Census
- ^b Based on fewer than 10 cases
- ^c Some children who were this age at the time of the study were a year younger at the time of the episode.
- ^d In addition to children who were 17 at time of the study, this category included children who were 17 at any time during period of eligibility.

Although boys may appear to be abducted somewhat disproportionately, in fact, the 58 percent in this sample is not significantly different from the population proportion.

It should be no surprise that family abductions were much more likely to occur in families where children were not living with

both parents (FA-3).³¹ These circumstances establish the motives for family abduction. Even when the perpetrator is not a parent, the occurrence of a divorce or separation often creates family conflict or concern that motivates an abduction by another family member. Half the abducted children were living with a single parent, and one-quarter were living with a parent who was remarried or had a live-in partner.

Table FA-3. Family Structure of Households With Children Involved in Broad Scope Family Abductions

	Family Abduction % (Unweighted N=142) (Weighted N=354,100)	U.S. Pop %
Both parents ^a	4% ^{b*}	67%
Single parent, no partner ^a	53% [*]	16%
Single parent, w/ partner ^a	24% [*]	7%
Neither parent ^a	5% ^b	3%
DK/NA	14%	8%

^a Categories in this table are as follows

Both parents = two natural, or adoptive parents

Single parent, no partner = unmarried or divorced, natural or adoptive parent with no spouse or unmarried partner in household

Single parent, with partner = natural or adoptive parent with a stepparent or nonmarital partner in household

Neither parent = living with other relatives, foster home, or with unrelated individuals

^b Based on fewer than 10 cases

* Differs from population estimate

³¹ The Household Survey information about the U.S. population distribution differs from Bureau of Census information, and this is especially true here, for Family Structure. It is nevertheless valid to compare the percentages for children with episodes to the survey-based estimated percentages for the U.S. general population, because they were derived from the exact same methodology.

In the distribution of Family Abduction by race/ethnicity, there was a small underrepresentation of Hispanics (Table FA-4). However, there were no significant disparities according to family income.

Table FA-4. Race and Household Income of Children Involved in Broad Scope Family Abductions

Race/Ethnicity	Family Abduction	U.S. Pop
	% (Unweighted N=142) (Weighted N=354,100)	%
White	80%	71%
Black	17%	15%
Hispanic	3% ^{a*}	11%
Other	0% ^{a*}	3%
Income		
< \$10,000	19%	14%
\$10,000 - \$20,000	19%	20%
\$20,000 - \$30,000	27%	25%
\$30,000 - \$40,000	16%	19%
\$40,000 ⁺	19%	22%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases
 * Differs from population estimate

Family Abduction appears to be disproportionately a southern phenomenon. Fully half of all the abductions occurred in the South (Table FA-5), which is many more than one would expect on the basis of the U.S. population distribution.³² In contrast, fewer of the Family Abductions occurred in the Midwest. Without more research,

³² As estimated from the full sample of households with children surveyed in the Household Survey.

we can only speculate on this interesting finding. It may be that the more traditional legal system in Southern States makes divorcing and separating parents more pessimistic about the possibility of getting a favorable custody arrangement, and so they take matters into their own hands. The reason for the finding about the Midwest is unclear.

Table FA-5. Region and Community Type of Children Involved in Broad Scope Family Abductions

	Family Abduction % (Unweighted N=142) (Weighted N=354,100)	U.S. Pop %
<hr/>		
Region ^a		
Northeast	17%	19%
Midwest	11%*	25%
South	50%*	35%
West	22%	21%
Community Type		
Large city	15%	18%
Suburb	19%	18%
Large town	20%	18%
Small town	26%	27%
Rural area	19%	19%

* Differs from population estimate

^a Northeast: ME, NH, VT, MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, PA

Midwest: OH, IN, IL, MI, WI, MN, IA, MO, ND, SD, NE, KS

South: DE, MD, DC, VA, WV, NC, SC, GA, FL, KY, TN, AL, MS, AR, LA, OK, TX

West: MT, ID, WY, CO, NM, AZ, UT, NV, WA, OR, CA, AK, HI

Characteristics of Family Abduction Episodes

The perpetrators of Family Abduction tended to be in their 30's (46%) with three out of four under the age of 40. Three-quarters were also men. Former husbands/boyfriends were the largest group, followed by current husbands/boyfriends (Table FA-6). A total of 81 percent of the family abductions were perpetrated by parents or parental figures; these are the episodes we would call "parental abductions."

Table FA-6. Age of Perpetrator and Relationship to Respondent in Broad Scope Family Abductions

	Family Abduction % (Unweighted N=141) (Weighted N=342,000)
<hr/>	
Age	
Under 30	30%
31 - 40	46%
41 or older	14%
DK/NA	10%
Relationship	
Former husband / boyfriend	42%
Current husband / boyfriend	21%
Former wife / girlfriend	8%
Current wife / girlfriend	3% ^a
Husband / boyfriend of ex-wife	1% ^a
Wife / girlfriend of ex-husband	6%
Male in-law	8% ^a
Female in-law	6%
Other male	1% ^a
Other female	3% ^a

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Table FA-7. Time Since Relationship With Perpetrator Ended for Broad Scope Family Abductions^a

	Family Abduction %
	(Unweighted N=86) (Weighted N=230,400)
Not ended	41%
1 - 6 months	3% ^b
6 - 12 months	5% ^b
1+ - 2 year	12% ^b
2+ - 3	11%
3+ - 4	20%
4 years	10%

^a Excludes those in a relationship, like relative, that could not be "ended"

^b Based on fewer than 10 cases

Interestingly, these episodes did not occur, as some might expect, in the immediate aftermath of a relationship breaking up (Table FA-7). Only 3 percent of children were abducted in the first 6 months after a breakup. Rather, most abductions occurred either in the midst of a relationship or not until 2 or more years later. In nearly half the episodes, the abduction took place 2 or more years after the end of the relationship. Several factors may help to explain this. First, it may take some time for divorcing spouses to establish separate, stable residences where it would be feasible for them to keep children. Second, some of the important life changes that precipitate Family Abductions often do not happen until some time after the breakup. For example, only when a separated or divorced parent moves to a new community may he or she have an incentive to keep or take a child. Or the development

of a new relationship by a separated or divorced custodial parent may spawn fears, resentments, or jealousies that precipitate an abduction. These new circumstances take some years to develop. Finally, it may take several years for divorcing parents to become disillusioned with the legal proceedings. At early stages, parents may hope their case will be heard favorably by the court. After some years of frustration in this arena, they may take matters into their own hands.

On the other hand, 41 percent of the abductions occurred in the midst of an ongoing relationship. These might largely be cases where a separation was impending, and where a parent, pessimistic about chances for obtaining custody, decided to take the child in a preemptive fashion. Or these could be "on-again, off-again" relationships, where an abduction occurred in the course of one of the temporary separations.

Table FA-8. Month, Time, and Day of Broad Scope Family Abductions

Family Abduction
%
(Unweighted N=142)
(Weighted N=354,100)

Month

January	11%
February	2% ^a
March	9%
April	7% ^a
May	4% ^a
June	7%
July	12%
August	23%
September	9%
October	6% ^a
November	5% ^a
December	6% ^a

Day

Weekend	22%
Weekday	66%
DK/NA	11%

Time of Day

Morning	12%
Afternoon	39%
Evening	28%
Night	11%
DK/NA	10%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

There did seem to be certain seasonal peaks in Family Abductions (Table FA-8). They tended to occur during or at the end of school vacation periods: summer vacations in July and August, and at the end of Christmas vacation in January. This probably reflects seasonal variations in opportunity. These are times when

children are visiting noncustodial parents, or when parents are not working and have the time and inclination to go and take children in violation of custody. Episodes started more often in the afternoon.

As will be recalled, the definition of Family Abduction used in this study included children who were kept or not returned in violation of custody agreements or mutual understandings, as well as children who were taken. Episodes were divided fairly evenly between those that involved a taking and those that involved a failure to return. Sixty percent of the situations involved violations of written custody orders; the rest violated mutual understandings (Table FA-9). Of course, this is one subject on which we are especially handicapped by not having the point of view of both parties. In some cases, what was perceived by our respondents as "violations" may have been honest disagreements (or misunderstandings) about the terms of a custody order or understanding.

Table FA-9. Violation of Custody Order or Mutual Understanding

Type of Arrangement Violated	Family Abduction % (Unweighted N=142) (Weighted N=354,100)
Written custody order	60%
Mutual understanding but not written custody order	39%

In the 49 percent of cases where children were actually taken, the children were taken most frequently from their own home, and less frequently from another home, such as that of a relative they were visiting (Table FA-10). The stereotypical case of parents grabbing children from schools and day care occurred in only a small proportion of cases. Force was used in about 14 percent of these takings.

Table FA-10. Location of Child Prior to Broad Scope Family Abduction

Location	Family Abduction
	% (Unweighted N=142) (Weighted N=354,100)
Own home	35%
Another home	8%
School / day care	2% ^a
Other	4% ^a
Already in custody of perpetrator	50%
DK/NA	1%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

The Policy Focal definition designated the most serious cases among Family Abductions. But several individual descriptors also give a sense of the spectrum of less serious to more serious episodes: how long the child was gone, whether the child was concealed or taken out of State, whether the police were contacted, and whether the child suffered harm during the episode. Some of these descriptors are shown in Tables FA-11 to FA-15.

Only a very small percentage of the Family Abductions were still unresolved at the time we talked to respondents (Table FA-

11). In 99 percent of all Broad Scope cases, the children were returned or recovered. This means that it was quite rare for a family member to successfully remove and hide a child or flee to a remote location, permanently altering the custodial arrangements or preventing the parent from having contact. However, some of the episodes were of relatively long duration: 10 percent lasted a month or more; 19 percent lasted more than a week. Nonetheless, close to one-half of the episodes (46%) lasted between two days and a week.

Table FA-11. Length of Child's Absence in Broad Scope Family Abductions

Absence	Family Abduction % (Unweighted N=137) (Weighted N=343,200)
Under 1 hour	4% ^a
2 - 6 hours	9%
8 - 24 hours	21%
2 - 6 days	28%
1 week	18%
More than 1 week, but less than 1 month	9%
1 month or more	9%
Not yet returned	1% ^a

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Table FA-12. Coercive Elements in Broad Scope Family Abductions

	Family Abduction ^a
	%
	(Unweighted N=142)
	(Weighted N=354,100)
Child taken out of State	9%
Force used	14%
Threats or demands	17%
Concealment of child	33%
Attempt to prevent child from contacting caretaker	41%
Attempt to permanently affect custodial privileges	40%

^a Percentages sum to more than 100 because many episodes combined more than one of these elements.

Another index of seriousness is removal from the State, because this takes a child out of the legal jurisdiction of the custody order and also makes recovery more difficult. This occurred in only 9 percent of Broad Scope episodes (Table FA-12). Fourteen percent of abductors used force. However, perpetrators did other things to interfere with parental rights besides simply taking or keeping the child. Seventeen percent made threats or demands. In one-third of the cases, the abductor attempted to conceal the child, and in 41 percent of the cases, the abductor tried to prevent telephone or written contact with the caretaker.

Still another indicator of seriousness is whether the aggrieved parent contacted the police or an attorney in order to assist in recovery (Table FA-13). Forty-four percent of the children were involved in episodes in which the caretakers actually contacted the police. Contacting an attorney was also common.

Table FA-13. Police and Attorney Contact in Broad Scope Family Abductions

	Family Abduction ^a * (Unweighted N=142) (Weighted N=354,100)
Police contacted	44%
Attorney contacted	50%

^a Column does not sum to 100 because episodes could involve either, neither, or both actions.

Our measure of how much harm the children suffered in the episode was crude. We simply asked the respondent to assess the harm. No independent evaluation of the child was made. Some of these children may have been harmed, for example, sexually abused without the knowledge of their caretaker. Other caretakers, angry about the episode, may have exaggerated its effects. So the assessments of harm must be interpreted with caution.

Table FA-14. Abuse or Harm to Child in Broad Scope Family Abductions

Type of Harm	Family Abduction	
	%	
	(Unweighted N=142)	
	(Weighted N=354,100)	
Sexually Abused		
Yes	<1% ^a	
Attempt	<1% ^a	
No	94%	
DK	4% ^a	
Physically Abused		
Yes	4%	
No	89%	
DK/NA	7%	
Physically Harmed		
Yes	4% ^a	
No	93%	
DK/NA	3% ^a	
Mentally Harmed		
Serious	16%	
Mild	15%	
Minor	9%	
None	54%	
DK whether or degree	5% ^a	

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Most of the children, it would appear, did not suffer serious harm as a result of the episode (Table FA-14). Only a small percentage of the children were sexually abused, at least to the extent known by their caretakers, although in absolute numbers this could still mean several thousand children. Physical abuse and physical harm occurred to 4 percent each (possibly the same children), small proportions that nonetheless represented thousands

of children. Serious mental harm--a vague term³³ that could cover a wide variety of difficulties--was suffered by 16 percent. Another 24 percent had some mild or minor mental harm. In reconciling this finding with other research that shows more abuse to children in family abductions, one must bear in mind that prior research has been largely based on samples of the more serious cases that come to police attention.

The seriousness of Family Abductions can be summarized as follows. Nearly half the Broad Scope cases were considered Policy Focal primarily because of concealment, attempts to prevent contact, and attempts to alter custody arrangements. About 4 out of 10 Broad Scope cases involved police contact, 3 out of 10 mental harm. Two out of 10 lasted more than a week. One out of 10 involved removal from the State and duration of a month or more. In a small percentage (1 percent or less) there was sexual abuse or inability to recover the child.

³³ Caretakers were allowed to interpret the term themselves.

Table FA-15. Whereabouts Known of Children Involved in Broad Scope Family Abductions

	Family Abduction % (Unweighted N=142) (Weighted N=354,100)
<hr/>	
Whereabouts known to caretaker	
Most of the time	48%
More than half the time	8%
Less than half the time	27%
Not at all	17%

Overall, the locations of most of the children were known to their caretakers most of the time during the Family Abductions (Table FA-15). Forty-eight percent said they knew the whereabouts "most of the time" and another 8 percent said they knew more than half the time. Only 17 percent did not know where their children were at all. This illustrates that Family Abduction is not primarily a problem of literally "missing children" but rather one of children who are not where they are supposed to be.

Conclusion

The Family Abduction problem has proved to be substantially larger in this study than most people had anticipated. The 354,100 Broad Scope cases make this more than three times larger than the largest of the widely quoted professional "guesstimates." The 163,200 Policy Focal cases make this the largest Policy Focal

category of any of the problems studied in NISMART. Moreover, given the kinds of social conditions on which this problem feeds--divorce, mobility, custody fights--we think Family Abduction is probably the most rapidly growing of the problems considered here, although such a conjecture goes beyond the actual findings of this study.

For these reasons, and also because Family Abduction does not have a very lengthy history of public attention, we think it should be on the top of the priority list for increased action. This may also be one of the most readily preventable of the "missing children" problems, and prevention approaches have not been widely applied. Thus, we especially recommend that major efforts be put into the prevention of family abductions. Finding and recovering family-abducted children is also important.

One important factor underlies the preventability of family abduction. The perpetrators of family abduction--who are parental figures in 8 out of 10 cases--have frequently participated in and are potentially accessible through the system that regulates custody issues. The occurrence of family abductions may reflect a failure of the child custody system to promote negotiation, communication, and compromise as solutions to custody problems. Legal processes, because they tend to be slow, inflexible, and intimidating, can contribute to the frustrations that lead to abductions. But these aspects of the custody process can be ameliorated. Courts can be made more responsive and sensitive. More emphasis can be placed on negotiation, and staff can be trained to manage the emotional as well as legal dynamics in

custody disputes. Experiments are currently underway to set up custody crisis hotlines and emergency services to help parties negotiate solutions to urgent custody conflicts, thus forestalling or resolving abductions. Millions of children are involved in custody situations, and there are not enough professionals trained to assist in the many foreseeable crises that divided families encounter.

A prevention approach to family abduction can also make use of improved deterrence, useful even (or especially) in situations where negotiation is not a possibility. Part of this can come from publicizing penalties and laws and the increasing effectiveness of recovery systems. But perhaps more important, judges, attorneys, and children's guardians, by becoming educated and aware, may be able to short-circuit potential family abductions by addressing this possibility more directly, discouraging this solution, and explaining the consequences. For example, attorneys for noncustodial parents might caution clients against abducting children.

The foregoing suggests that family abduction prevention has a high potential for success. This will be increasingly true as we learn more about the problem, because new knowledge may allow us to recognize and target custody situations where an abduction is most likely to occur. Thus, it should be a research priority to find out more about how to diagnose high-risk situations.

In addition, there is much more to be learned about the effects of family abduction on children. This may also be useful in discouraging perpetrators, but in any event it will certainly

be helpful in treating children who have been affected. Some work has already been done in this area. Case studies (mostly of prolonged cases) show marked psychological trauma in the short and long term.^{34,35,36} Symptoms such as difficulty in trusting other people, withdrawal, poor peer relations, school problems, regression, anxiety, fearfulness, and depression have been noted. It seems doubtful that such problems would occur from brief episodes, but they might if such brief episodes were chronic occurrences. Psychiatrists and psychologists have also expressed concern that such episodes can teach a child disrespect for the law and contribute to alienation from one or both parents.

Family abductions are a new frontier for public policy and research. Although this problem occurs with discouraging frequency, there are potentially big payoffs in the near future for successful prevention initiatives in this area, thereby improving the security and well-being of large numbers of children.

³⁴ Agopian, M. (1984), op. cit.

³⁵ Schetky, D., & Haller, L. (1983), op. cit.

³⁶ Terr, L. (1983). Child snatching: A new epidemic of an ancient malady. Journal of Pediatrics, 103(1), 151-156.

FAMILY ABDUCTION SUMMARY SHEET

Incidence

- 163,200 Policy Focal children
- 354,100 Broad Scope children

Summary of findings for Broad Scope Family Abductions

Profile groups

- Primarily children 2 to 11 years old
- Lower for infants and older teens
- From families affected by divorce and separation

Demographics

- Higher in South
- Lower in Midwest

Perpetrators

- Three out of four are men
- 81 percent parental abductions

Circumstances

- 2 or more years after divorce/separation or before relationship ends
- Half of episodes are failures to return, half takings
- Most takings are from children's homes
- More common at end of vacations: January, August

Duration

- 46 percent last 2 days to 1 week
- Only 1 percent not yet returned

Distance

- One in 10 taken out of State

Missing

- Caretakers know whereabouts of more than half
- 17 percent whereabouts entirely unknown

Police contact

- 44 percent police were contacted

Harm

- 40 percent experience some mental harm (as assessed by caretaker)

Chapter 4

NON-FAMILY ABDUCTION

Controversy abounds on the subject of non-family abductions, the category in this study that includes stranger kidnappings. The annual number of stranger abductions has been estimated at anywhere from a few dozen to 50,000.^{1,2} Some have seen these cases as the tragic essence of the missing child problem. Others have dismissed them as simply "mythical."³

At its core, however, this controversy has been primarily about definitions, not numbers. On the one hand, there is a popular stereotype of a stranger kidnapping and, on the other hand, a more technical legal conception of an abduction, and these two are far apart. The stereotype of kidnapping draws from nationally notorious and tragic cases of abduction like those involving the Lindbergh baby, Bobby Franks, and more recently, Adam Walsh and the John Wayne Gacy murders. Thus, to most people, kidnapping entails the removal of a child from his/her home and parents for an extended period primarily for purposes of ransom, for sadistic or sexual assault, or even for murder.

However, the actual legal definition of abduction, although varying from State to State, is much more inclusive. In some

¹ Griego, D., & Kilzer, L. (1985). Exaggerated statistics stir national paranoia. Denver Post, May 12, 12A.

² Best, J. (1987). Calculating the number of children abducted by strangers: Dark figures and child victims. Paper presented at the Pacific Sociological Association, Spring.

³ Schneider, P. (1987). Lost innocents: The myth of missing children. Harper's, February, 47-53.

States, abduction can mean the coercive movement ("asportation" in legal terms) of a person even a small distance--in California, courts have set it at 22 feet--as well as the unlawful confinement of a victim for a period of time as short as a half hour.^{4,5} Thus, many violent crimes can entail abduction as an element without necessarily entailing the lengthy drama of the stereotypical kidnapping. When strangers drag children into cars or alleys to sexually assault them, these are abductions. Similarly, when a robber takes a hostage into a getaway car and releases him or her shortly thereafter, this is also an abduction. Many abductions are so brief that a child is never even truly "missed" by a parent or guardian. Moreover, police and prosecutors often do not investigate or charge these offenses as abductions, because even more serious and salient crimes (like rape and murder) were perpetrated. But they are abductions under the law, nonetheless.

Much understandable controversy about non-family abduction occurs when abductions are counted using a legal definition, but the results are interpreted using the popular stereotype. When advocates for missing children say that there are "thousands of stranger abductions," many discriminating people find it implausible, based on their experience from the news and from their neighborhoods, because they are thinking of cases like Adam Walsh. But using a legal definition, such an incidence of abductions is

⁴ Diamond, J. (1985). Kidnapping: A modern definition. American Journal of Criminal Law, 13(1), 1-36.

⁵ Kanter, S. (1983). Kidnapping. Encyclopedia of Crime and Justice, 3, 993-999.

not implausible. For example, the FBI⁶ reports close to 90,000 forcible rapes every year.⁷ Children (most commonly, teenage girls) are frequent victims, accounting for one-third to one-half of the cases.⁸ Many forcible rapes may involve enough coercive movement or detention to qualify legally as abductions. So it was not out of the question to think that there were thousands of legally defined abductions of children each year. Still, while these are certainly heinous crimes, to many people they are not kidnappings in the sense that Adam Walsh was kidnapped.

These considerations have shifted the debate for some people involved in the controversy from "what are the true numbers?" to "what is the true definition?"⁹ But in today's reality, there are two definitions. Someday the legal definition may take account of the popular stereotype by assigning it a different name or codifying it into special statutes, but this is not yet the case. Or someday, the popular stereotype may expand to encompass the legal definition. But even so, the particularly frightening and heinous ransom, murder, and disappearance abductions will remain a special category. Thus, we believe it is premature to conclude that there is any single "correct" definition of abduction. Any

⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigation (1985). Uniform crime reports for the United States, 1984. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice.

⁷ The amount of unreported rape is far greater than what is reported to the police (Diana Russell, Sexual exploitation: Rape, child sexual abuse and workplace harassment, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1984), but we cite reported figures here, since previous estimates of abduction have been based on analyses of police statistics.

⁸ Katz, S., & Mazur, M.A. (1979). Understanding the rape victim: A synthesis of research findings. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

⁹ Best, J. (1988). Missing children, misleading statistics. The Public Interest, 92, 84-92.

incidence estimate of the number of non-family abductions has to acknowledge the need for a figure that corresponds to the legal definition of abduction as well as one that corresponds to the popular stereotype.

Defining Non-Family Abduction

Recognizing that there are currently two conceptions of the crime of abduction, we have created two definitions, one corresponding to the legal view, the Legal Definition Abduction, and one corresponding to the public stereotype, the Stereotypical Kidnapping.¹⁰

The core element of abduction in both definitions involves the coerced, unauthorized movement of a child; the detention of a child; or the luring of a child for the purposes of committing another crime. The Stereotypical Kidnapping has more stringent requirements concerning time, distance, and the identity of the perpetrator.

The Legal Definition Abduction is truly broad and encompassing. We need to emphasize this point: Legal Definition Non-Family Abduction is far broader than the stereotype many people have when they think of stranger kidnapping. It is more inclusive on a number of dimensions:

1) It requires only a small amount of coerced movement. It includes cases where a child was simply taken forcibly into a

¹⁰ This distinction between the legal and public definition of crime is widely noted in the field of criminology. See Gibbons, D.C. (1977). Society, crime and criminal careers. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

vehicle or building, or a distance of more than 20 feet. Thus, a child taken from the street into a building or a wooded area, raped and released, was abducted under this definition of Legal Definition Abduction.

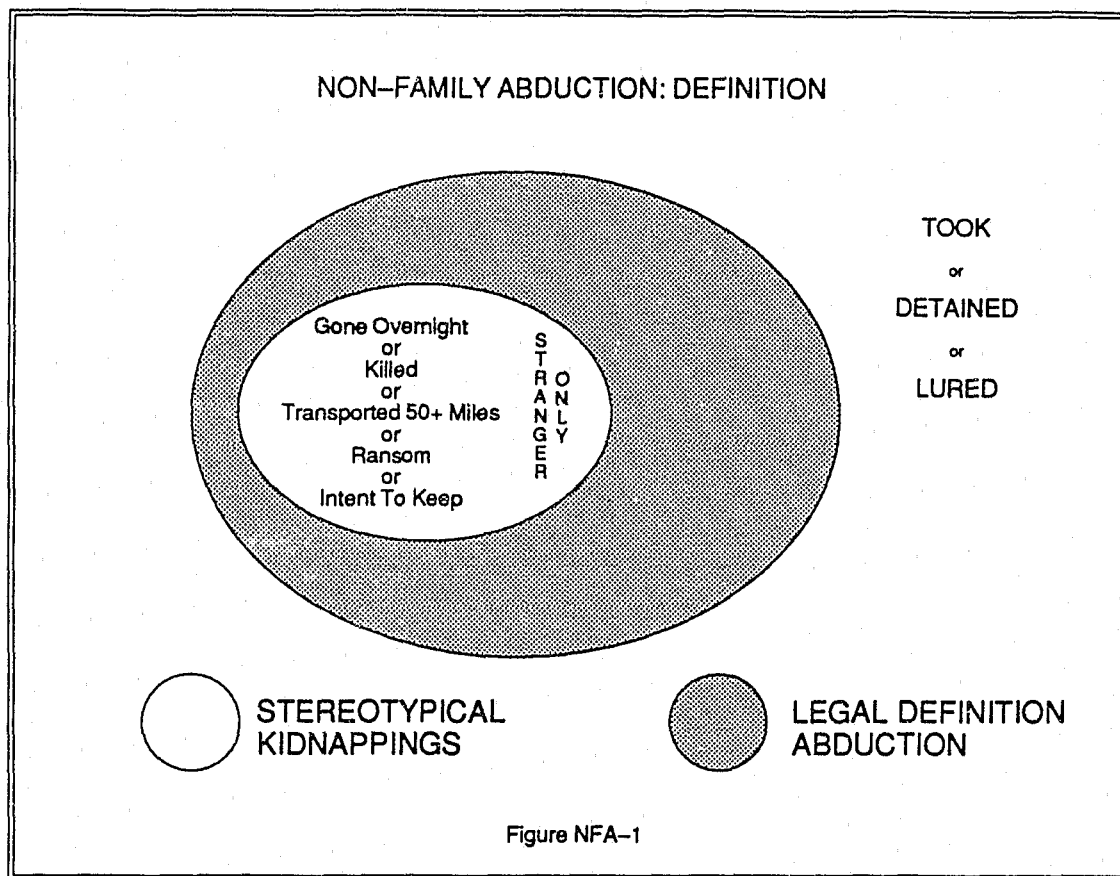
2) The Legal Definition Abduction has lenient requirements for the time during which the child must be detained. If the child was forcibly moved or lured, then any amount of time was sufficient. If the child was detained without movement, then only 1 hour of detainment was required. Thus, if a robber held a child hostage in a variety store for an hour, this was a Legal Definition Abduction under our definition.

3) Legal Definition Abductions include any "non-family" perpetrators: for example, acquaintances, neighbors, babysitters, as well as strangers. This category was used because it includes all the potential perpetrators not counted in Family Abduction and is the one currently preferred by the federal government.

In contrast, the Stereotypical Kidnapping is meant to apply to the severe kinds of cases where, for example, a child was taken a large distance, or killed in the process of the abduction, or gone a substantial period of time. Thus, the Stereotypical Kidnapping refers to cases that qualified as Legal Definition Abductions and in which one of the following also happened (Figure NFA-1):

- 1) the child was gone overnight; or
- 2) the child was transported a distance of 50 miles or more from the point of abduction; or
- 3) the child was killed; or

- 4) the child was ransomed; or
- 5) the perpetrator evidenced an intent to keep the child permanently.



These are all characteristics of the more serious and the more stereotypical types of stranger abductions. The Stereotypical Kidnapping is also limited to abductions perpetrated by strangers, since this is such an integral part of the popular stereotype of these crimes. Babysitters and other known persons may abduct children in serious ways, but these kinds of crimes are perceived in a different light than abductions by strangers.

We subjected the Stereotypical Kidnapping to a validation test, using newspaper stories of crimes against children. We hypothesized that newspaper reporters used the Stereotypical Kidnapping view of the problem when they used the words "abduction" or "kidnapping," and that these words would only appear in stories about crimes that actually met the Stereotypical Kidnapping criteria, not about crimes that only met the Legal Definition Abduction criteria. This turned out to be largely the case. Coders reviewed 600 newspaper stories of crimes against children nationwide, provided by a newspaper clipping service over a 12-month period (December 1987 through November 1988). Of the 85 stories involving strangers where reporters used the words "abduction" or "kidnapping", 92 percent met the criteria for our Stereotypical Kidnapping. That is, 92 percent of the time when the words "abduction" or "kidnapping" appeared, they meant the child was gone overnight, taken a distance of more than 50 miles, killed, ransomed, or the perpetrator was trying to keep the child permanently--all markers of Stereotypical Kidnappings.

The words "abduction" or "kidnapping" are almost never used in newspapers to apply just to what we have termed Legal Definition Abductions. In fact, the seven cases in our newspaper review that did not meet the Stereotypical Kidnapping criteria were also quite a bit more serious than simple Legal Definition Abductions. In one, the child was taken 18 miles and held 4 hours. In another, a robber stole a car with a sleeping infant in the back seat, later abandoning the car. In two others, mentally disturbed women took children from hospitals, and while the children were recovered the

same day, it was possible that they intended to keep the children permanently.

These findings confirm that when reporters write about and the public reads about "abductions" and "kidnappings," they are thinking about something much more serious and specific than the legal definition of these terms. This is why it is important when counting abductions to distinguish between Stereotypical Kidnappings and Legal Definition Abductions.

There is another confusion about Non-Family Abduction, in both Legal Definition Abductions and Stereotypical Kidnappings, that needs to be clarified. A child does not necessarily have to have been missed by his/her parents or guardians in order to qualify. When a child who was on the way home from school was pulled into a car, driven somewhere, raped, and released, this child suffered a Legal Definition Abduction even though her parents may not have known that she was anywhere other than where she was supposed to be until after the fact. In Stereotypical Kidnappings, however, because most of the children were gone overnight, they will almost always have been missed. But a child could have been abducted and murdered and found by the police before the parents had noticed the child was missing. This would have been a Stereotypical Kidnapping, even though the child was never missed.

Please note also that, unlike the approach we have used in all other categories, we have not distinguished between "Broad Scope" and "Policy Focal" cases of Non-Family Abduction. Although the media have given more attention to the Stereotypical Kidnappings, nonetheless, Legal Definition Abductions are serious crimes that

engage the police, prosecutors, legislators, and the FBI. Thus, within our terminology all Non-Family Abductions are Policy Focal.

In addition to actual Non-Family Abductions, NISMART tried to define and count events called Attempted Non-Family Abductions. We recognized that children can be frightened and harmed, and the police can be called, in situations where abductions were attempted, but were unsuccessful. An Attempt was defined as a situation in which a non-family member tried to take, detain, or lure a child, and, if the action had been successful, the situation would have probably met the the criteria for a Legal Definition Abduction.

Admittedly, there is a degree of subjectivity in the Attempted category. It is inherently difficult to judge what would have happened in a situation had it continued or what a potential perpetrator's intent might have been. Nonetheless, we felt it appropriate to include a category of Attempted Non-Family Abduction because it is an indicator of the potential danger to children and an important component of public perceptions about the problem. However, Attempts are not counted in the total Legal Definition Abduction or Stereotypical Kidnapping estimates.

In summary, Legal Definition Non-Family Abductions include many short-term, short-distance coercive movements of a child which often took place in the course of other crimes, like sexual assault, committed by strangers as well as known individuals who were not family members.

Stereotypical Kidnappings included the most serious Adam-Walsh-type cases and were limited to those cases where children

were held at least overnight; or were transported 50 miles or more; or were killed; or were held for ransom; or where the perpetrator intended to keep the child permanently. In these cases all perpetrators were, by definition, required to be strangers.

Attempts were situations that, if successful, would have met the requirements of a Legal Definition Abduction.

Brief Review of Data Sources

The primary estimate of the incidence of Non-Family Abduction came from the Police Records Study.

Police Records Study. The Police Records Study counted the number of abductions that were recorded in the course of the year in a nationally representative sample of 83 law enforcement agencies. The law enforcement agencies were selected from a nationally representative sample of 21 counties in 16 States, using well-established sampling procedures that ensured the necessary mix of regions and of urban, suburban, and rural areas. Then, within each county, records were canvassed in the county sheriff's department, the State police department (if they had jurisdiction over such cases), and in a sample of municipal police departments. One hundred percent of the agencies selected for the sample agreed to participate--a remarkable level of participation for a study of this sort.

Field workers were sent out to law enforcement agencies to search and abstract the records. Four types of files were searched: 1) files on abductions (or kidnappings; 2) files on

missing persons; 3) files on homicides; and 4) in four selected counties only, files on sexual offenses.

Field workers did not determine whether a case involved an abduction. Instead, information about the cases in these files was abstracted onto forms that were designed to obtain all details important for determining whether a crime met our definitions (such as distance moved). Later, the information abstracted about each case was systematically evaluated against the study criteria to see if the situation qualified as an abduction.

One strength of the study was the extremely high level of participation obtained. Another strength was the relatively wide net that it cast in search of potential abductions. Recognizing that police do not necessarily file cases involving abductions in abduction or missing persons files, the search of the homicide and (in a subset of counties) of the sexual assault files made it possible to discover many additional abduction cases.

However, this approach also served to illustrate that abductions may have been filed among other kinds of cases not searched in the study. It was simply not possible, given time and money constraints, to search all police records for the abductions that were not listed separately as such, yet might have occurred in connection with a robbery, a physical assault, a motor vehicle theft, or any one of a dozen other crimes. Thus, this method may have somewhat undercounted the total number of abductions that were filed in police records.

There was another problem: the quality of police records was extremely variable. They could be very complete or very sketchy,

depending on how much officers knew and how much they recorded. Moreover, the information of most importance to the study was not necessarily the information of most importance to the police. Also, different jurisdictions kept different kinds of records. The information we most wanted was sometimes missing from the record because the record forms did not request that information.

On the other hand, one strength of the Police Record Methodology was its ability to identify and count sufficient numbers of the most serious kinds of Non-Family Abductions to permit estimates of national incidence. The Household Survey approach, which was used as the primary method of studying the other categories explored in NISMART, avoided all the problems of relying on "reported cases" and "official records." But its drawback was its difficulty in counting much lower frequency events such as Non-Family Abductions. Such episodes occurred to so few children that even interviews with over 10,000 households with children were unable to hit very many where such events occurred. We could not construct any reliable estimate for Legal Definition Abductions or for Stereotypical Kidnappings from the Household Survey. Thus, we needed a more sensitive method for counting these lower frequency types of episodes.

The FBI Data Reanalysis. A special portion of NISMART was devoted to trying to estimate the number of children killed in the course of stranger abductions every year. Good national figures on all homicides are kept by the FBI in the Supplemental Homicide Report, and while they record much information on the homicides themselves, they do not, unfortunately, specify whether an

abduction was involved. Nevertheless, by using information that was available in this FBI data over a 12-year period (1976-87), we were able to exclude many of the homicides as unlikely to have entailed a stranger abduction. This left an estimate of the upper limit of the number of homicides that could have entailed a stranger abduction.

Household Survey. Although we did not expect the Household Survey to yield enough cases of Non-Family Abduction to provide a reliable incidence estimate, we included questions about Non-Family Abductions to empirically test this expectation. Three of the screener questions were intended to elicit reports from caretakers about possible Non-Family Abductions or Attempts:

1) "Was there any time when anyone tried to take [any of these children] away against your wishes?"

2) "Was there any time when anyone tried to sexually molest, rape, attack, or beat up [any of these children]?"¹¹

3) "Has anyone ever kidnapped or tried to kidnap [any of these children]?"

If respondents answered yes to any of these screeners, some additional qualifiers were asked to make sure that the perpetrator was not a family member and that the event had occurred in the relevant time period. Then they were administered a lengthy series of questions about the episode. The details of the episode were

¹¹ In the first two waves of the study this question read: "Was there any time when an adult or other child tried to sexually molest, attack, beat up or rob [any of these children]?" The "or rob" section was dropped because we were receiving too many irrelevant accounts of children who had had money stolen from them at school.

carefully evaluated against the definitional criteria to see if it met the definition of a Non-Family Abduction or Attempt.

Table NFA-1. Estimated National Incidence of Non-Family Abductions, 1988

	Number of Children	Rate per 1000 Children 0-17
<u>Police Records Study</u>		
Legal Definition Abductions ^a	3200-4600 ^b	.05-.07
Stereotypical Kidnappings	200-300 ^b	.003-.005
Attempts (not in official count)	370-430 ^b	
<u>FBI Data</u>		
Stranger abduction homicides ^c	43-147 ^d	.001-.002
<u>Household Survey</u>		
Legal Definition Abductions Attempts	114,600	Unable to estimate 1.80

^a Includes Stereotypical Kidnappings.

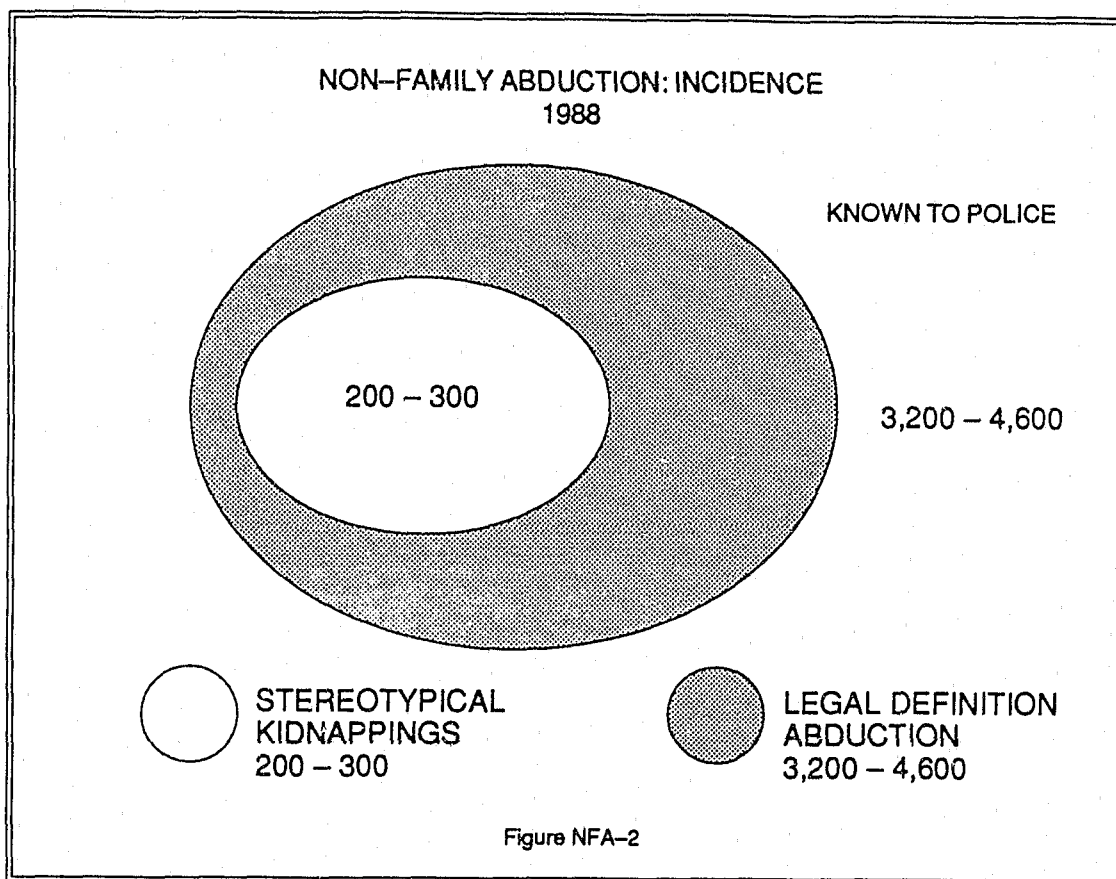
^b Figures are based on National Estimate from abduction, homicide and missing person files multiplied by a "correction factor" to reflect cases that might be found in sexual assault files (based on a purposive-sample four county study). Range reflects correction factor for highest and lowest county.

^c Average for 1976-1987.

^d Range represents with and without "undetermined" category (see text)

The Incidence Estimates

We estimate that there were a total of between 3,200 and 4,600 Legal Definition Non-Family Abductions known to law enforcement in 1988 (Table NFA-1 and Figure NFA-2).



We also estimate that there were between 200 and 300 Stereotypical Kidnappings. Stereotypical Kidnappings are abductions where strangers held children overnight, murdered them, transported them 50 miles or more, demanded ransom, or gave indications of an intent to keep the child permanently.

In addition, there were between 370 to 430 attempted Legal Definition Abductions known to police, not included in the full count.

These figures from the Police Records Study are based on two components: a core estimate with a known statistical precision from a 21-county sample and a "multiplier" inferred from the sexual offense files in the four counties where these were examined. The national survey of 21 counties yielded the core estimate of 1,400

Legal Definition Abductions, and 200 Stereotypical Kidnappings located in homicide, abduction, and missing person files. To this we applied a "multiplier" representing the number of additional cases we might have found in sexual assault files had we examined these files in all 21 counties. This multiplier, based on what we found in our four-county substudy,¹² was the ratio of the number of cases in the sexual assault files to the number of cases in the homicide, abduction, and missing person files. The "multiplier" is between 2.3 and 3.3 for Legal Definition Abductions, representing an additional 1,800 to 3,200 cases. The multiplier is smaller for the Stereotypical Kidnappings, adding from 0 to 100 more cases. The multiplier is almost negligible for the Attempts.

Our estimate of stranger abduction homicides is between 43 and 147 children based on the reanalysis of FBI data.¹³ This estimate is an average for the 12-year period,¹⁴ computed this way to eliminate the year-to-year fluctuations. The range reflects our uncertainty about how to classify a group of homicides in FBI statistics whose characteristics were "undetermined" (Table NFA-2). The low estimate (43) excludes and the high estimate (147)

¹² These four counties were chosen on the basis of size, but are not necessarily representative, so the multiplier is of unknown precision.

¹³ Conceptually, these stranger abduction homicides are a portion of what we have defined as Stereotypical Kidnappings as well as Legal Definition cases, although they come from a completely different source. They are not to be added to the other incidence figures.

¹⁴ The estimates given here differ by a small amount from estimates made in a previous publication (G. Hotaling & D. Finkelhor, Stranger Abduction Homicides of Children, Juvenile Justice Bulletin, January, 1989), because FBI data from the three most recent years (1985-87) have been added to the earlier analysis.

includes these undetermined cases, although it is very doubtful that they could all have involved abductions.

Table NFA-2. National Incidence of Stranger Abduction Homicides (1976-1987) - FBI Data Reanalysis

Criminal Circumstances	Total Cases from FBI Database	Rate Per 1,000,000 Children*
Rape	14	0.2
Other sexual offense	3	0.0
Other felony types	7	0.1
Other suspected felonies	19	0.3
Undetermined	104	1.6
Total (<u>excluding undetermined circumstances</u>)	43	0.7
Total (<u>including undetermined circumstances</u>)	147	2.3

* Average estimated child population for years 1976-87 used as the denominator in the calculation of rates.

We had not expected that our Non-Family Abduction questions in the Household Survey would yield enough cases to permit us to calculate a national estimate, and, in fact, they did not. There were 15 actual cases that met the criteria for Legal Definition Abductions, but it was not possible from these to formulate a national estimate because it would have been associated with an unacceptably low degree of precision. For example, the confidence interval for the estimate would have included zero, with a coefficient of variation well above 50 percent. Moreover, these were too few cases to analyze for any reliable profile data, such as ages of the children involved.

We did, however, encounter a sufficient number of cases that qualified as Attempts to formulate an estimate from the Household Survey. We calculated that an estimated 114,600 children nationwide were involved in Non-Family Abduction Attempts in 1988. These attempts represented situations which we judged would probably have qualified as Legal Definition Abductions, had they succeeded.

Since prior estimates of non-family abductions have ranged from a few dozen to 50,000 and have been the subject of much heated controversy and because the present findings involve several potentially confusing new estimates, it is important to review all these new estimates carefully. In particular, we want to consider them in the context of anything else we know about non-family abductions that would recommend confidence or caution in the interpretation of these estimates.

In the case of the estimates for abduction homicide, the comparison of two parts of the NISMART does add confidence. Murders of children are notorious crimes, widely publicized, generally well-documented by the police. Our reanalysis of the FBI data from the police yielded an "upper bound" estimate of 43 to 147. At the same time, another NISMART data source roughly confirms this order of magnitude. In our own searching of police records in the sample of police agencies, we found that about 5 percent of the estimated 1,400 countable Legal Definition Non-Family Abductions based on the combined homicide, abduction, and missing person files involved a homicide. Although we can make no exact estimate of abduction homicides from the small numbers in the

police records, the order of magnitude is nonetheless clear and quite consistent with the finding from the FBI Data Reanalysis. These numbers (43 to 147) may appear small in absolute terms, but they represent horrendous crimes, often traumatizing whole communities for months, even years afterward. The data suggest they occur across the country at the rate of perhaps one to three per week.

There are also some official statistics against which we can compare the estimate for Stereotypical Kidnappings. Here again, we are talking about a highly salient type of crime--children who are abducted overnight, taken a large distance, held for ransom, or killed by strangers. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), the clearinghouse for information on these kinds of crimes, has kept figures over the last 5-year period. Their cases are more generally of the Stereotypical Kidnapping type. They report receiving an average of about 100 reports per year.¹⁵ This would seem consistent with the NISMART estimate that there are 200-300 Stereotypical Kidnappings per year. Undoubtedly, NCMEC is not alerted about every case but is certainly aware of a substantial portion. Our data suggest that NCMEC is informed about perhaps 33 to 50 percent of the Stereotypical Kidnappings.

The estimate for Legal Definition Abductions presented here is the hardest to validate against any other source. Many of these abductions are not thought of as abductions, even by police, and

¹⁵ Rabun, J. (1989, July). Memorandum. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

they are not necessarily reported as such in newspaper accounts. So experts' and lay people's sense of what this number should be is understandably vague.

One confirmation of this study's estimate comes from the only other systematic study of Non-Family Abduction. In 1984, at the request of NCMEC, two cities, Jacksonville and Houston, allowed a records search of all crimes against children for cases that involved kidnapping.¹⁶ Although the researchers used a less precise definition of abduction, theirs may have been roughly equivalent to our Legal Definition Abduction criteria (or perhaps even broader). They found a total of 269 cases of crimes involving kidnapping (the majority of which were sexual assaults). Of these cases six were homicides. That suggested that homicides constituted about 2 percent of Legal Definition Abductions in police records in these two cities. If that percentage were roughly the same for the country (a major supposition), then on the basis of our FBI data on homicides (43 to 147), we would have expected between 2,100 and 7,300 Legal Definition Abductions nationwide. Our range, 3,200 to 4,600, falls within this range.

However, there are also reasons to believe that our national estimate for Legal Definition Abductions could be low. First, there may have been some Legal Definition Abductions that were reported to police but still not counted in this survey. For example, in some physical or sexual assaults the police may have

¹⁶ National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (1986). An evaluation of the crime of kidnapping as it is committed against children by non-family members. Washington, DC: National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

failed to provide in the record any indication of the coerced movement of the victim, even though coerced movement occurred. The study would not have counted these cases. Also, there could have been cases that the police for some reason filed in an unusual crime category not searched by the study, for example, under auto theft. In the Jacksonville-Houston study,¹⁷ although the vast majority of crimes that were counted as abductions had been filed in the sexual assault, homicide, abduction, or missing person files, 20 percent of these crimes were from "miscellaneous" other files. In our Police Records Study, these latter cases would have been missed.

However, the biggest potential unknown for our estimate of Legal Definition Abductions concerns crimes not reported to the police. Our methodology based estimates on the review of police records, and so unfortunately bypassed Legal Definition Abductions that did not get reported to the police. One can imagine, for example, a teenage girl who is abducted, taken somewhere, and raped, but who fails to report this crime because she is ashamed or blames herself. Or one can imagine a neighborhood teenager who lures a younger child into his house, molests, and forcibly detains the child for over an hour, but the parents never report the crime to spare the neighbor family from the public disclosure. Potentially countable cases like these would not have been included in this study's estimates of Non-Family Abduction because they relied on episodes known to the police.

¹⁷ Ibid.

It is unlikely, however, that the number of unreported abduction-related crimes--at least those that are known to caretakers--would be on the order of magnitude of the other problems studied in NISMART. If they were, they should have shown up in the Household Survey in greater numbers, numbers sufficient to allow a reliable estimate of their incidence using that methodology. We can say, then, that the number of Legal Definition Abductions known to caretakers is somewhere between our police study estimate and the prevalence of the other NISMART categories.

However, there is yet another source of possible underestimate for Legal Definition Abductions that is completely outside the bounds of either our police or household survey methodology. These are abductions not even known to caretakers. It is possible to imagine children who were assaulted and abducted, such as in a gang rape, but who did not reveal these assaults even to their parents, because of shame or fear of retaliation. Unfortunately, there is no basis in NISMART for an idea of the full magnitude of the Non-Family Abduction problem that includes this component, one that goes beyond the cases known to police and beyond those known to caretakers.

It was possible from the Household Survey, however, to derive an estimate of Attempted Legal Definition Non-Family Abductions that were known to caretakers. In comparison to the estimates from the Police Records Study, the estimate for Attempted Abduction from the Household Survey appear very large: 114,600. To understand why caretakers disclose so many more attempts than are evidenced in police records, several points must be kept in mind.

First, as we indicate below, in a majority of cases where caretakers knew of an Attempted Abduction, the caretakers did not actually contact the police. For the most part, this reflects the fact that the children did not have good descriptive information to help identify the person who made the attempt, and in all cases, the children escaped from the situation and were not actually hurt. In some cases, caretakers also believed that school officials or some other parent had already notified the police. So they did not make a report.

Second, even when caretakers did contact the police, police may have made no record of it. In many of the episodes, there may have been no actual crime to record. The majority of the attempts involved strangers trying to lure children into cars. Generally, the stranger made some statement to the child, like "Get in the car," but did not use force and left when the child ran for help. Since there usually were no witnesses, and little identifying information was typically available to go on, this type of event may not have been entered into the files we searched or perhaps any crime files. This again illustrates the enormous difference between police records and caretaker reports as information sources. The phenomenon of Attempted Non-Family Abduction studied from the perspective of police records is a very different one from the phenomenon as reported by caretakers and children.

Demographics of Non-Family Abductions¹⁸

The Legal Definition Abductions from the Police Records Study and the Homicides from the FBI data were the only cases numerous enough for demographic analysis, so these are relied on exclusively in this section. A brief analysis of Attempted Non-Family Abductions based on the Household Survey is presented after the analysis of completed Legal Definition Abductions.

Among Legal Definition Abductions known to police, teenagers and girls were clearly the children most likely to be abducted by a non-family member. Almost 50 percent of the Non-Family Abductions occurred to children 12 and older (Table NFA-3).¹⁹ And three-quarters or more of the victims were girls. This is the biggest gender disparity of any of the categories of children studied in NISMART. The obvious explanation is that about two-thirds or so of the Non-Family Abductions involved sexual assaults. As explained earlier, the sexual assault multiplier was 2.3 to 3.3, meaning that at least 57 to 70 percent of combined Legal Definition Abductions came from sexual assault files. An additional 20

¹⁸ The tables on demographics and characteristics in this chapter have separate breakdowns for the national sample from the abduction-missing-person-homicide files and the four-county sample from the sexual assault files. For a variety of methodological reasons, the percentages cannot be averaged together or melded, nor should the n's of the two columns be added together for any purpose. The weighted n in the sexual assault files is just for four counties and its addition to the weighted n in the first column does not yield a national estimate.

¹⁹ In some tables such as NFA-3, data appear to be missing on variables crucial for deciding whether and in what category a case counted in the study. If the case is included in a table it means that although precise information on the variable (such as exact age) was missing, nonetheless it was possible from the record to determine that the case met the study criteria (i.e., the victim was a child).

percent or more of the cases in the abduction, missing person, and homicide files involved sexual assault, too. So most of the children were abducted in conjunction with and in order to facilitate sexual attacks. Teenagers and girls are among the most frequent victims of sexual attacks. While the stereotypical victim of stranger abduction is often presented as a preadolescent child, older children actually seem to be at the highest risk.

Table NFA-3. Age and Gender of Children Involved in Legal Definition Non-Family Abductions -- Police Records Study

	Non-Family Abduction %		U.S. Population %
	Abduction-Missing- Homicide Files ^b (Unweighted N=216) (Weighted N=1400)	Sexual Assault Files ^c (Unweighted N=180) (Weighted N=700)	
Age			
0 - 1	11%	-	10%
2 - 3	4%	2% ^a	11%
4 - 5	9%	3% ^a	11%
6 - 7	4% ^a	2% ^a	11%
8 - 9	5%	2% ^a	10%
10 - 11	4% ^a	5% ^a	10%
12 - 13	16%	10%	10%
14 - 15	19%	12%	10%
16 - 17	16%	23%	16%
Child - age unspecified	12%	41%	-
Gender			
Boys	26%	11%	51%
Girls	74%	89%	49%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

^b National Sample

^c Four-county sample. The weighted number in this column is not a national estimate.

Table NFA-4 shows a markedly larger percentage of black and Hispanic victims of Non-Family Abduction than expected based on their representation in the child population. This is consistent with statistics on crime in general, reported sexual assault, and also crimes against children, all of which occur disproportionately to minorities.

Table NFA-4. Race of Children Involved in Legal Definition Non-Family Abductions--Police Records Study

Race	Non-Family Abduction %		U.S. Population %
	Abduction-Missing- Homicide Files (Unweighted N=216) (Weighted N=1400)	Sexual Assault Files (Unweighted N=180) (Weighted N=700)	
White	35%	24%	71%
Black	31%	41%	15%
Hispanic	25%	29%	11%
Other	6% ^a	4% ^a	3%
DK/NA ^b	3% ^a	1% ^a	-

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

^b Don't Know / Not Available

Returning to our findings from the reanalysis of FBI data, we note that the characteristics of children murdered in the course of stranger abductions parallel the findings on Non-Family Abductions from the police records (Table NFA-5). Older teens are by far the most common victims. The young children frequently pictured as victims of such crimes are at only one-fourth this risk

or less. Minority children also seem to be at high risk.²⁰ While girls are at higher risk in the cases where the circumstances are known, this disproportion was reversed when the "undetermined circumstance" cases were included.

Our only interpretable figures on region come from the FBI Data Reanalysis (last panel of Table NFA-5). They show an excess of stranger abduction homicides in the West, when the "undetermined circumstance" cases were excluded. This excess is swamped by stranger homicides of undetermined circumstance from the Northeast, when these are included. We are reluctant to draw any conclusions about regional variations.

However, the FBI data, because they cover multiple years, do allow a conclusion about historical trends: there has been no increase in the number of stranger abduction homicides over the last decade. Table NFA-6 and Figure NFA-3 show that while in individual years the number (including the "undetermined") has reached as high as 212, there has been no discernible trend across time.

²⁰ Unfortunately, during most of the time period, it was very difficult to ascertain Hispanic ethnicity from the FBI data.

Table NFA-5. Age, Gender, Race, and Region of Children in Stranger Abduction Homicides, 1980-1987--FBI Data Reanalysis^a

	Excluding Undetermined Circumstances ^b	Including Undetermined Circumstances ^b
<u>Annual rate per 1 million children</u>		
<u>Average</u>		
<u>Yearly Total</u>	0.7	2.3
<u>Age</u>		
0 - 4	0.3	0.8
5 - 9	0.5	1.0
10 - 13	0.5	1.4
14 - 17	1.5	6.5
<u>Sex</u>		
Male	0.4	2.6
Female	0.9	2.0
<u>Race</u>		
White	0.6	1.6
Black	1.0	6.0
Asian ^c	1.8	5.2
Native American ^c	1.1 ^d	2.2
<u>Region</u>		
Northeast	0.3	4.0
Midwest	0.4	1.7
South	0.4	1.8
West	1.8	2.3

^a Average population estimates for the years 1980-1987 used in the calculation of age, sex, and race specific rates and in child population data by region. Population data reported in U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989 (103rd -111th editions), Washington, DC.

^b See Tables NFA-2 and SHR-1 (Chapter 2) for more information on included circumstances.

^c Population estimate based on 1980 data. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1981 (103rd edition), Washington, DC.

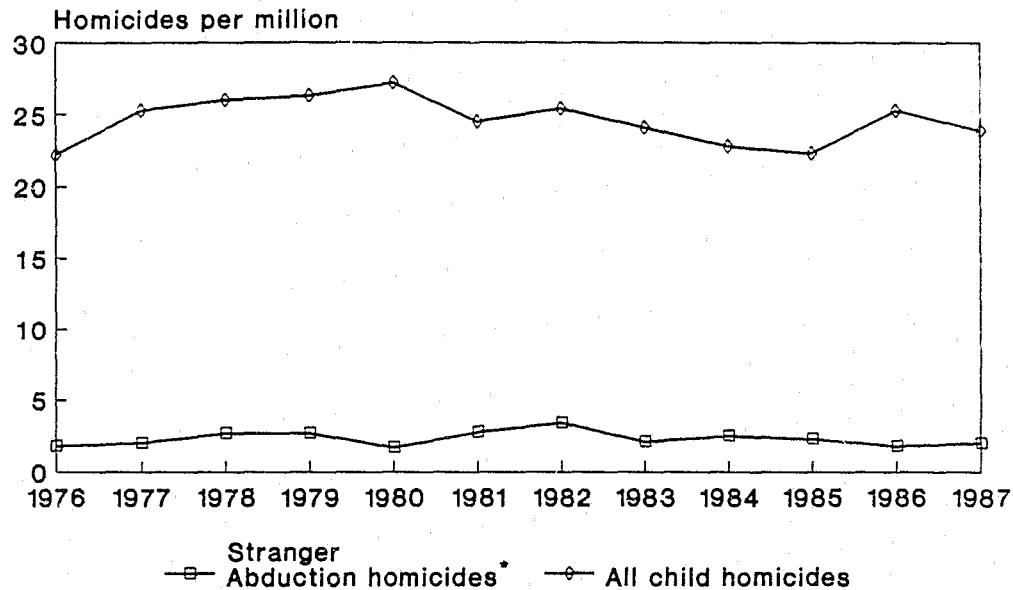
^d Based on fewer than 10 cases.

Table NFA-6. Historical Trends in Stranger Abduction Homicide, 1976-1987--FBI Data Reanalysis

Year	N of Stranger Abduction Homicides ^a	Stranger Abduction Homicides Age-Specific Rates per 1,000,000	N of All Child Homicides ^b	All Child Homicides Age-Specific Rate per 1,000,000
1976	120	1.8	1446 ^c	22.2
1977	126	2.0	1625	25.3
1978	177	2.7	1647	26.0
1979	166	2.7	1682	26.3
1980	110	1.7	1731	27.2
1981	177	2.8	1547	24.5
1982	212	3.4	1594	25.4
1983	134	2.1	1510	24.1
1984	156	2.5	1431	22.8
1985	147	2.3	1452	23.0
1986	114	1.8	1599	25.3
1987	126	2.0	1516	23.9

- a Estimates generated from the Comparative Homicide File (Williams & Flewelling, 1987).
- b Estimates from FBI's Uniform Crime Report, Crime in the United States, 1977 through 1987.
- c Since the FBI presents homicide data in age groups, an estimate of the number of 15-17 year olds included in the age group 15-19 was made. Starting in 1985, the Uniform Crime Reports presented a new grouping of murder victims "under 18." From these data it is possible to calculate that 43 percent of all victims 15-19 years of age were 15, 16, or 17. The 43 percent figure was used on data from 1976-1984 to estimate a count of murder victims 15-17 years of age.

STRANGER ABDUCTION HOMICIDES OF CHILDREN, 1976-87



*Includes "undetermined"

Figure NFA-3

Characteristics of Non-Family Abductions

Information on the characteristics of Non-Family Abductions from the Police Records Study (the only source of analyzable data in NISMART on Legal Definition Abductions) is unfortunately limited by the large quantities of unavailable or missing data in the records. Thus, the profile of Non-Family Abduction cases is far sketchier than those for episodes studied through the Household Survey.

Perpetrators were overwhelmingly males (Table NFA-7). In fact, in the sexual assault cases, they were all males. In the abduction, missing person, and homicide files, however, there were a few females; a possible example would be a woman abducting a baby for the purpose of raising him/her as her own. A majority of Legal

Definition Abductions were also perpetrated by strangers. However, among sexual assault cases there were a substantial proportion perpetrated by acquaintances. Where perpetrators' ages were known, most were relatively young. The perpetrators in the sexual assault file may have been even somewhat younger, but the majority were of an unknown age.

Table NFA-7. Sex, Age, and Relationship of Perpetrator(s) in Legal Definition Non-Family Abductions--Police Records Study

	Non-Family Abduction	
	Abduction-Missing- Homicide Files (Unweighted N=216) (Weighted N=1,400)	Sexual Assault Files (Unweighted N=180) (Weighted N=700)
Sex of Perpetrator		
Male only	78%	99%
Female only	7%	-
Male and female	8%	-
NA ^a	6% ^b	1% ^b
Age of Perpetrator		
15 or under	6%	1% ^a
16 - 20	9%	18%
21 - 30	23%	14%
31 - 40	11%	6%
41 or older	2% ^b	0% ^b
NA ^a	49%	61%
Relationship		
Strangers only	62%	50%
Any acquaintance	19%	41%
Other	11%	6%
NA ^a	8%	3% ^b

^a Not Available

^b Based on fewer than 10 cases

Although June had a large number of cases (Table NFA-8), there did not appear to be an entire season that was a high frequency time. Non-Family Abductions were more likely to occur on weekdays than weekends, and they were more common in the afternoon. Children were primarily abducted from the street (Table NFA-9). They were taken most often into vehicles, but the cases from the sexual assault files also show a fair proportion taken into buildings and homes.

Table NFA-8. Month, Day, and Time of Legal Definition Non-Family Abductions--Police Records Study

	Non-Family Abduction	
	Abduction-Missing-Homicide Files (Unweighted N=216) (Weighted N=1,400)	Sexual Assault Files (Unweighted N=180) (Weighted N=700)
Month		
January	6%	6%
February	6%	7%
March	6%	9%
April	11%	9%
May	8%	6%
June	19%	6%
July	8%	9%
August	7%	6%
September	7%	13%
October	5%	7%
November	6%	9%
December	11%	10%
NA	1% ^a	2% ^a
Day		
Weekday	80%	65%
Weekend	19%	32%
NA	1% ^a	3% ^a
Time of Day		
Morning	13%	15%
Afternoon	46%	38%
Evening	29%	31%
Night	7%	11%
NA	5%	5%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Table NFA-9. Location of Legal Definition Non-Family Abductions -- Police Records Study

	Non-Family Abduction %	
	Abduction-Missing- Homicide Files (Unweighted N=216) (Weighted N=1,400)	Sexual Assault Files (Unweighted N=180) (Weighted N=700)
Location From Which Victim Moved		
Street	52%	43%
Home/yard	16%	13%
Another home	3% ^a	6%
Public setting	4%	2% ^a
School	4% ^a	4% ^a
Park	0% ^a	2% ^a
Other	17%	22%
NA	4%	8%
Location Taken To		
Vehicle	46%	23%
Building, including home	6%	21%
Field, parking area	4%	14%
Other	33%	38%
NA	11%	4% ^a

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Table NFA-10. Force and Weapon Presence in Legal Definition Non-Family Abductions -- Police Records Study

Non-Family Abduction		
	Abduction-Missing- Homicide Files (Unweighted N=216) (Weighted N=1,400)	Sexual Assault Files (Unweighted N=180) (Weighted N=700)
Force Used Against Victim		
Definitely	87%	85%
Possibly ^b	3%	4% ^a
NA	10%	11%
Weapon Used Against Victim		
Yes	75%	86%
NA	25%	14%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

^b There were no cases where the use of force could be entirely ruled out.

The Non-Family Abductions were violent crimes. According to police records, close to 9 out of 10 involved the use of force against the victim (Table NFA-10). In three-quarters or more, the victim was threatened with or wounded by a weapon.

Table NFA-11. Distance Moved in Legal Definition Non-Family Abductions--
Police Records Study

Distance	Non-Family Abduction %	
	Abduction-Missing- Homicide Files (Unweighted N=216) (Weighted N=1,400)	Sexual Assault Files (Unweighted N=180) (Weighted N=700)
1 mile or less	2% ^a	1% ^a
2 - 5 miles	0% ^a	-
6 - 10 miles	0% ^a	-
11 - 25 miles	3% ^a	-
26 - 100 miles	5% ^a	-
NA	90%	99%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

The inadequacy of the police records is apparent when it comes to assessing the distance that victims were transported (Table NFA-11). In the vast majority of cases, no measurable specifics were given. The records might read "Perp. drove her to the park," but from such information it was impossible to determine exact distances (though it was possible to evaluate whether the case "probably" fit our 20-foot criterion from a description such as this).

Table NFA-12. Time Held in Legal Definition Non-Family Abductions--
Police Records Study

	Non-Family Abduction %	
	Abduction-Missing- Homicide Files (Unweighted N=216) (Weighted N=1,400)	Sexual Assault Files (Unweighted N=180) (Weighted N=700)
1 hour or less	12%	21%
2 - 6 hours	13%	10%
7 - 24 hours	12%	4% ^a
More than 1 day to 1 week	4% ^a	1% ^a
Not yet returned	6%	-
NA	53%	64%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Much information was also unavailable on how long the victims were held. However, it is clear that among cases with information, the vast majority of abductions lasted less than 24 hours (Table NFA-12). Four percent of the cases in the abduction, missing person, and homicide files lasted 2 days to a week, and in 6 percent the child was still missing at the time of the last police entry.

Ransom kidnappings constituted about 8 percent of the total cases from the abduction-missing person-homicide files (Table NFA-13). There were no such cases in the sexual assault files. Injuries to the children (lacerations, broken bones, internal injuries) were noted in the police records for between 14 and 21 percent of the episodes, depending on the source of the case (abduction-missing person-homicide or sexual assault files).

percent of the episodes, depending on the source of the case (abduction-missing person-homicide or sexual assault files).

Table NFA-13. Ransom and Injury in Legal Definition Non-Family Abductions
-- Police Records Study

	Non-Family Abduction %	
	Abduction-Missing- Homicide Files (Unweighted N=216) (Weighted N=1,400)	Sexual Assault Files (Unweighted N=180) (Weighted N=700)
Ransom Request		
Yes	8%	-
No	91%	-
NA	1% ^a	100%
Child Injured		
Yes	14%	21%
No	38%	26%
NA	49%	53%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Attempted Non-Family Abductions

The picture of Attempted Non-Family Abductions from the Household Survey contrasted with the picture of actually completed Legal Definition Non-Family Abductions from the Police Records Study. This was largely due to the fact that the information on Attempts came from caretakers, who generally provided more complete information than we found in police records. And here, too, we had access to types of episodes that, absent an actual crime, would not likely have been recorded in police records.

The Attempts occurred to a somewhat younger group of children (Table NFA-14). Children between ages 4 and 11 experienced most of the Attempts. Adolescents, who were the predominant victims of the Legal Definition Abductions located in police records, were not overrepresented in Attempts.

Table NFA-14. Age and Sex of Children Involved in Non-Family Abduction Attempts -- Household Survey

	Non-Family Abduction Attempts * (Unweighted N=36) (Weighted N=114,600)	U.S. Pop
Age		
0 - 1	3% ^a	10%
2 ^b - 3	8% ^a	11%
4 ^b - 5	19% ^a	11%
6 ^b - 7	4% ^a	11%
8 ^b - 9	26% ^a	10%
10 ^b - 11	20% ^a	10%
12 ^b - 13	9% ^a	10%
14 ^b - 15	10% ^a	10%
16 ^b - 17 ^c	0% ^a	16%
Sex		
Boys	44%	51%
Girls	56%	49%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

^b Some children who were this age at the time of the study were a year younger at the time of the episode

^c In addition to children who were 17 at time of the study, this category includes children who were 17 at any time during period of eligibility

Attempts were also more equally distributed among boys and girls. The disproportion of girls in the police records on actually completed abductions did not show up to the same extent

with Attempts. One hundred percent of the Attempts were committed by strangers.

Attempts were defined as situations that if successful would have ended up qualifying as actual Legal Definition Abductions, although, in reality, it is difficult to know for certain what would have happened. We do know that Attempts did not result in the actual removal of a child into a building or car or a distance of more than 20 feet or detention for over an hour, because these would have qualified as actually completed Abductions, rather than solely as Attempts.

Most Attempts involved lures, as opposed to explicit efforts to take or detain (Table NFA-15). In these lure situations, one or two strangers driving by in a car would slow or stop and try to entice or cajole a child, or sometimes several children, to get into the car. The children often refused outright and always ran, but in these lures there was little physical coercion. Force actually came into play in less than one-fifth of the Attempts. In 5 percent of the Attempts, strangers used force to detain a child. In 13 per cent, strangers used force to try to take a child.

Table NFA-15. Type of Attempted Non-Family Abductions - Household Survey

		Non-Family Abduction Attempts	
		%	
		(Unweighted N=36)	
		(Weighted N=114,600)	
Attempt to Detain		12% ^a	
by force			5% ^a
no force			7% ^a
Attempt to Take		39%	
by force			13% ^a
no force			26% ^a
Attempt to Lure (no force)		65%	
Police contacted		42%	

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

The fact that so many of the Attempts involved unsuccessful lures is further conveyed in the kinds of harm the children suffered (Table NFA-16). Although we presume that many if not all Attempts involving lures had sexual assault as their underlying motive, in fact no actual sexual abuse occurred in any of these situations. Moreover, only 3 percent of the potential victims were physically abused and suffered physical harm. Most harm was psychological, as children experienced fright and panic and some evidenced lingering fears afterwards. Twenty-seven percent of the caretakers noted some level of mental harm to their child from the experience.

Table NFA-16. Abuse or Harm to Child in Non-Family Abduction Attempts--
Household Survey

		Non-Family Abduction Attempts %
		(Unweighted N=36) (Weighted N=114,600)
<hr/>		
Sexually Abused		
Yes		0%
Attempted		11%
No		81%
DK		8% ^a
Physically Abused		
Yes		3% ^a
No		97%
Physically Harmed		
Yes		3% ^a
No		97%
Mentally Harmed		
Serious		5% ^a
Mild		11% ^a
Minor		11% ^a
None		67%
DK whether or degree		5% ^a

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

The narrative descriptions of Attempts revealed them to be primarily situations where strangers unsuccessfully tried to lure children into their cars, and where children were physically unscathed, although sometimes quite frightened.

Conclusions

This study has helped to inform the controversy over Non-Family Abduction by recognizing that the term can refer to two different crimes that are often confused. There are kidnappings

by strangers that fit the general stereotype, involving ransom, homicide, the child being gone a substantial time or taken a substantial distance--what we have called Stereotypical Kidnappings. We estimate that these very serious crimes number between 200 and 300 a year.

Then there are abductions in the legal sense, where children are moved, detained, or lured over shorter distances or time periods, usually in the course of other crimes like sexual assault. These crimes number in the thousands. Our estimate of 3,200 to 4,600 known to the police probably underestimates the extent of the problem, to the degree that these crimes are not reported to the police.

We have a relatively high degree of confidence in our estimate of the incidence of Stereotypical Kidnappings. These are such serious crimes that we believe they are generally reported to the police and recorded by the police, so the Police Records Study should give a fairly accurate estimate of this problem. Moreover, our estimate here is not far off, since its order of magnitude is generally confirmed by the statistics of the National Center on Missing and Exploited Children, which also receives reports about serious kidnappings, and by FBI data on the numbers of abduction homicides in the nation.

We are less confident about the estimate of the number of Legal Definition Abductions. Many children and caretakers may not report assaults to the police, particularly sexual assaults, where abduction may have occurred. Moreover, even when they receive a report about a sexual assault, police do not reliably record the

elements of movement and detention in their investigative reports about such crimes. This makes it difficult to rely on Police Records for an estimate of the incidence of Legal Definition Abductions.

A reliable estimate of this problem based on the Household Survey would have provided a welcome correction to the estimate based on police records. But as we anticipated, we encountered too few actually completed Legal Definition Abductions in our interviews with caretakers to permit any estimate of acceptable reliability.

The fact that there are not tens of thousands of Stereotypical Kidnappings is somewhat reassuring news for anxious parents and frightened children. But there is very little true consolation in these numbers. They represent some of the most heinous crimes committed against children in this country, crimes in which children are terrorized, brutalized, raped, murdered, and locked up. In one-quarter of the Stereotypical Kidnappings, and one-twentieth of the Legal Definition Abductions, the child was actually killed. In three-quarters of the Legal Definition Abductions a weapon was used. Even the knowledge that they are relatively rare can do little to mitigate the fears that these crimes inspire in the communities where they occur. To some degree these fears are archetypal in their source and proportions. Such events scar even children and families who are not personally involved.

Because of their seriousness and the emotions they generate, Non-Family Abductions need to be the focus of a concerted public

policy. One part of that policy needs to concentrate on education and prevention and another on law enforcement.

For education and prevention, a key message to communicate is the interconnection between abduction and sexual assault. There are a few ransom abductions and a few newborn abductions, but sexual assault appears to be the predominant motive for non-family abduction. (We estimated that around two-thirds of Legal Definition Abductions involved sexual assaults, as did a third of the abduction homicides of known circumstance reported by the FBI.) We have learned a great deal in the last decade about sexual assault. For example, we have learned how widespread it is, how early and repetitively some offenders start assaulting, and how connected it is to social attitudes that denigrate women and children.^{21,22} Many of the same programs that have been developed to prevent sexual assault should also help to prevent these Non-Family Abductions.

For example, the widely disseminated programs that try to educate children on how to avoid sexual abuse^{23,24,25} (programs that have been tailored for children at all levels) should also be of use to children in avoiding abduction. The treatment programs to

²¹ Burgess, A.W. (1985). Rape and sexual assault: A research handbook. New York: Garland.

²² Russell, D. (1985). Sexual exploitation. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

²³ Finkelhor, D., & Associates (1986). Sourcebook on child sexual abuse. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

²⁴ Finkelhor, D., & Strapko, N. (1989). Sexual abuse prevention education: A review of evaluation studies. In D. Willis, E. Holder and M. Rosenberg (Ed.), Child abuse prevention. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

²⁵ Cooper, S., Lutter, Y., & Phelps, C. (1983). Strategies for free children. Columbus, OH: Child Assault Prevention Project.

identify and treat sexually deviant youth and adolescents²⁶ should also prevent some individuals from becoming abductors. And public efforts to challenge and change myths about rape and negative stereotypes about women will also undercut some of the motives for abductions.

The public and professional community also needs to clearly conceptualize abduction as part of the sexual assault problem, with teenagers and girls being particularly high-risk groups. One implication of this is that communities may want to evaluate whether they have a problem with Non-Family Abduction based on their rate of sexual assault. Police departments may also want to make sure that officers who specialize in handling sexual assault cases be among those to receive any supplementary training offered on abductions. Another implication is that the aftereffects on victims of sexual assault may need to be understood as aftereffects of abduction as well. The abduction component of the event may, in fact, sometimes be more psychologically significant to the victim.

Further, if law enforcement personnel do believe the stereotype that Non-Family Abductions occur primarily to younger children, then this belief has to be corrected. It can possibly lead to an inadequate response to criminal acts against older children.

²⁶ Knopp, F.H. (1982). Remedial intervention in adolescent sex offenses: Nine program descriptions. Syracuse, NY: Safer Society Press.

Beyond the findings about actual Abduction, this study has some important new information about the prevalence of Attempted Abductions. In American communities, we estimated that 114,600 children had encounters in 1988 where it appeared that the children could have been abducted. The majority of these attempts were attempted lures, where strangers tried to get children to enter cars. All, by definition, were unsuccessful.

Without further analysis, it may be premature to draw many conclusions about these Attempted Abductions. But in understanding their implications, several things are important.

First, the definition of an Attempt included a component of subjectivity. NISMART evaluators inferred, on the basis of caretaker reports, what could have happened in the situation. But it is really impossible to judge what the intent of potential perpetrators was or how real was the risk inherent in many of these situations. The descriptions of the episodes make it clear that the great majority of these were not cases where children misconstrued the intent of a completely benign stranger who was asking for directions. In nearly all the lure situations the perpetrator was reported to have clearly said things like "Get in the car." Because the event did not proceed further, however, we do not know whether some of these perpetrators may have been primarily trying to harass or taunt a child, without real criminal intent. However, the events were clearly perceived as real threats by most of the affected children and their caretakers.

In this light, it is interesting to note that the police were contacted about only 42 percent of the episodes. In a few of the

cases where they were not called, the caretaker appeared to dismiss the episode on the grounds that "nothing happened." Others said they did not contact the police because they had learned someone else had already alerted the authorities. Still others seem to have doubted that the police could do anything, because the child was unable to provide very much information about the person, the car, and so forth. Finally, some caretakers may have wanted to shield the children from police interrogation.

Certainly, the large number of Attempted Stranger Abductions does have important implications. For one, it does seem to justify teaching children about "stranger danger." The fact that so many children seem to have escaped from possibly dangerous situations says that children can and do effectively thwart attempts, and the need for such skills seems to arise frequently. Our findings here do not speak to the effectiveness of the specific types of "stranger danger" warnings that are currently used, but the dangers they are intended to counteract do exist. These findings also suggest that there may be a need to emphasize skills of observation, so that children who are accosted can provide better information about these strangers.

Moreover, the finding that Attempted Stranger Abductions are this prevalent helps to make sense of the continuing concern that American parents have about stranger abduction. When children have "close calls," such as those documented here, the news must spread to other parents in the community. Such experiences must combine with the stories that families hear from newspapers and on

television to give a sense that the risk of serious stranger abduction is quite real.

However, it is less clear what implications the large number of attempted abductions have for our knowledge about actual abduction. The findings about the prevalence of attempted abductions could be a clue that a large number of actual abductions do not get recorded, or recorded as such, by the police. But they could also simply reflect that fact that the vast majority of attempted abductions are foiled.

In addition to the above, NISMART has implications for research and data collection, too. The bitter controversies over the incidence of Non-Family Abduction in the past have been unfortunate. We believe measures could be taken to eliminate these unnecessary conflicts.

1) A permanent distinction in terminology needs to be established between the two types of Non-Family Abductions that we have here defined as Legal Definition Abductions and Stereotypical Kidnappings. We believe this distinction already exists informally in public discourse, as illustrated by our content analyses of news articles, and to a large extent in police recordkeeping. The distinction should be formalized (not necessarily using our terminology) in public discussion and even in crime statutes and recordkeeping systems. Policymakers and advocates should be encouraged to clarify what type of abduction they mean whenever they use the term.

2) Similarly, we recommend more uniform State definitions and criminal statutes on non-family abduction. One of the current

obstacles to accurate records and meaningful nationwide statistics about abduction is the variability across States in what constitutes an abduction or kidnapping. There is more variability on this crime than on many others. National figures cannot be collected, and local studies cannot be extrapolated to other jurisdictions without more uniformity and comparability.

3) We recommend that law enforcement agencies develop and be encouraged to adopt recordkeeping systems that systematically identify abduction as a component in other crimes. Abductions are hard to count in many agencies because there is no mechanism for insuring that records on other crimes will systematically note the presence of an abduction. Many people would like a separate offense category for abduction. But abduction is frequently not the most serious crime committed, so it is impractical to expect systems that file crimes by their most serious component to accurately count abductions. However, law enforcement agencies could dramatically improve the degree to which abductions are noted as an element of other crimes. Abductions could be systematically counted in the context of other crimes in the same way the presence of firearms is indexed. The full implementation of a new uniform crime reporting system, the National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS), which will be collecting data on crimes, crime components, age of victims, and victim-perpetrator relationship, may make this a possibility.²⁷

²⁷ Bureau of Justice Statistics (1988). National Incident Based Reporting System Handbook. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

4) We recommend that research policy, in addition to public awareness concerning non-family abduction, recognize how intimately this crime is linked to crimes of sexual assault and also, to a lesser extent, homicide. We doubt that it is possible or makes sense to study abduction apart from such other crimes. Abduction is most often a facilitative act, and there are relatively few cases where the taking of the child is the main aim of the abductor. It may be useful and efficient to encourage researchers in the areas of sexual assault and homicide to focus more on the abduction component of the episodes they are already studying.

NON-FAMILY ABDUCTION SUMMARY SHEET

Incidence

- 200 - 300 Stereotypical Kidnappings
- 3,200 - 4,600 Legal Definition Abductions Known to Police
- 43 - 147 Abduction homicides
- 114,600 Attempts reported by caretakers

Summary of Findings for Legal Definition Abductions

Profile groups

- Half of victims are 12 or older
- Three-quarters of victims are girls

Demographics

- Higher risk for blacks and Hispanics

Perpetrators

- Mostly men
- Mostly strangers

Circumstances

- Over two-thirds involve sexual assault
- Victims mostly taken from the street
- Over 85 percent involve force
- Over 75 percent involve weapon

Duration

- 12 to 21 percent last less than 1 hour
- Most last less than 1 day
- 2 percent not yet returned

Distance

- Police records make ascertainment of distances difficult

Missing

- Police records make ascertainment of missing status difficult

Police contact

- 100 percent (study was based on police records)

Harm

- 14 to 21 percent of children were known to be injured

Chapter 5

RUNAWAYS

America could be called a nation of runaways with no exaggeration of the historical record. The settlement and expansion of this country was driven by people, many of them adolescents, running away from home and family, from slave masters and employers.¹ Children and adults alike ran to America and within America to escape tyranny and oppression, to seek adventure, and to make their fortunes. Running away was an admired and venerable tradition in American culture. Folk heroes as diverse as Benjamin Franklin and Davy Crockett were runaways as was one of the most beloved of all America's literary figures, Huck Finn.

Today, running away in America is seen less as a romantic tradition and more as a serious social problem. This shift is the result of both changed social conditions and greater knowledge. For one thing, there are fewer frontiers, either geographic or economic, where young people without education can "pull themselves up by their bootstraps." In modern, technological, bureaucratic America, too few runaways "make it" to sustain the romantic ideal.

Even more important, we know much more about the causes and costs of running away. Running away has always had its darker side, even if not always acknowledged. Runaways became victims of crime and exploitation throughout every period of America's past. They went homeless and hungry and resorted to stealing, prostitution, and panhandling to support themselves. They were

¹ Lipschutz, M.R. (1977). Runaways in history. Crime and Delinquency, 23, 321-332.

resented in the communities where they arrived and were often treated harshly, if not cruelly, by established authority.²

Today, we know that when many children run, it is often to escape from a protracted and painful family conflict or from physical, sexual, or psychological abuse. We also know what may lie in wait for the long-term runaway: homelessness, drugs, crime, sexual exploitation, and suicide.

Governmental concern about running away as a social problem long predates the current interest in missing children. The reform school movement and the establishment of the juvenile court system early in this century focused on so-called "delinquent" youth, many of whom were what we would call today the runaway and the homeless. During the Great Depression large numbers of runaways were assisted by the Federal Relief Administration which in 1933 established camps and shelters for young people. More recently, the Runaway Youth Act of 1974 was the first Federal initiative to provide shelter and counseling explicitly to runaways.

Given this history, it is not surprising that of all the categories of children covered in this report, runaways have been studied the best. Hundreds of research reports can be found over the years in books, government documents, academic journals, and popular periodicals. What is new, however, is the fusion of the runaway problem with the current concern about abducted children. This marriage has not been an easy one. Although abducted children and runaway children pose very different problems, concern about

² Libertoff, K. (1980). The runaway child in America: A social history. Journal of Family Issues, 1(2), 151-164.

these groups got fused for four reasons. First, for the law enforcement community, abducted children are sometimes difficult to initially distinguish from runaways. It simplified matters to have both problems organized within a common framework. Second, there was some reason to believe that runaway children were at higher risk for abduction. Third, the public alarm about the dangers to missing children reinvigorated concern about runaways, which had been somewhat played out since the mobilization of the middle 1970's. Finally, the legions of runaways (estimated in the hundreds of thousands) gave heft to figures needed to create public and political concern for both problems.

But the merging of runaways and abducted children into the common rubric of missing children has created its own problems and confusions. Of major concern is the question of whether all runaways are in fact missing children. Many people have tried to equate them. For example, testimony given before the House Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights in November 1981 explained that "each year in the United States, approximately two million children disappear. Of these, approximately 1,850,000 are runaways, 100,000 are taken by a parent, and 50,000 simply disappear."

Yet all runaways do not disappear. Evidence in this study and elsewhere^{3,4} suggests that many parents know where their children

³ Opinion Research Corporation (1976). National statistical survey on runaway youth. Princeton, NJ: Opinion Research Corporation.

⁴ Gold, M., & Reimer, D.J. (1974). Testimony before the Committee on Education and Labor, Subcommittee on Equal Opportunities, Hearing on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and Runaway Youth. 93rd Congress, 2nd Session, 2 May 1974, Y4.Ed8/1: J 98/7.

are when they run away, that they stay in their own communities and often at the homes of relatives and close friends. This is only one among many of the research questions that prompted the present study.

Defining Runaways

Any definition of running away must cover a wide range of behaviors from the child who leaves home in anger and returns the next day to the child who leaves town to join a religious cult and is never heard from again. We have tried to distinguish three types of runaway phenomena with our definitions: 1) children gone at least 1 night, whom we call "Broad Scope Runaways"; 2) children in particular jeopardy because of not having a secure place to stay, whom we call "Policy Focal Runaways"; and 3) children involved in minor episodes, which we call "Runaway Gestures."

Most prior research has defined running away by reference to a child leaving home without permission and staying away some length of time. Our definition maintains this convention but adds another one as well. Children who are already away with permission, but refuse or choose not to come home when they are supposed to, are also considered to have run away. Thus, the actions of a child who has permission to go to a party on a Friday night but fails to return at the expected time and stays away all weekend would be considered running away as much as the child who is prohibited from going to the party but leaves anyway and stays away all weekend. Both forms of running away involve being gone

without permission but one involves "leaving" and the other, "staying away."

Broad Scope Runaways. This category refers to children who leave or stay away without permission for at least overnight. Being away overnight denotes a certain level of seriousness and has been used as a definitional marker in much past research.^{5,6} The only exception concerns children 15 and older who are out with permission but fail to return at the appointed time. Because so many older teenagers violate curfews and stay out at parties until early morning hours, a 2-night period of staying away is required before such older children are counted as Broad Scope Runaways.

Policy Focal Runaways. The designation of a Policy Focal group of runaways is our attempt to highlight the kinds of runaways who have been of most concern to policymakers. As mentioned earlier, research shows that many runaways run to the homes of friends and relatives. The situation of a child whose parents refuse to allow her to go to a party but who runs and spends the night at a friend's house is quite different from that of a child who is out on the street without a safe place to stay. Police have concentrated their efforts on this at-risk group, and have also sought to have runaways defined in reference to this group.

The Policy Focal Runaways are defined as children involved in episodes where, in addition to meeting broad scope criteria, the

⁵ Opinion Research Corporation. Ibid.

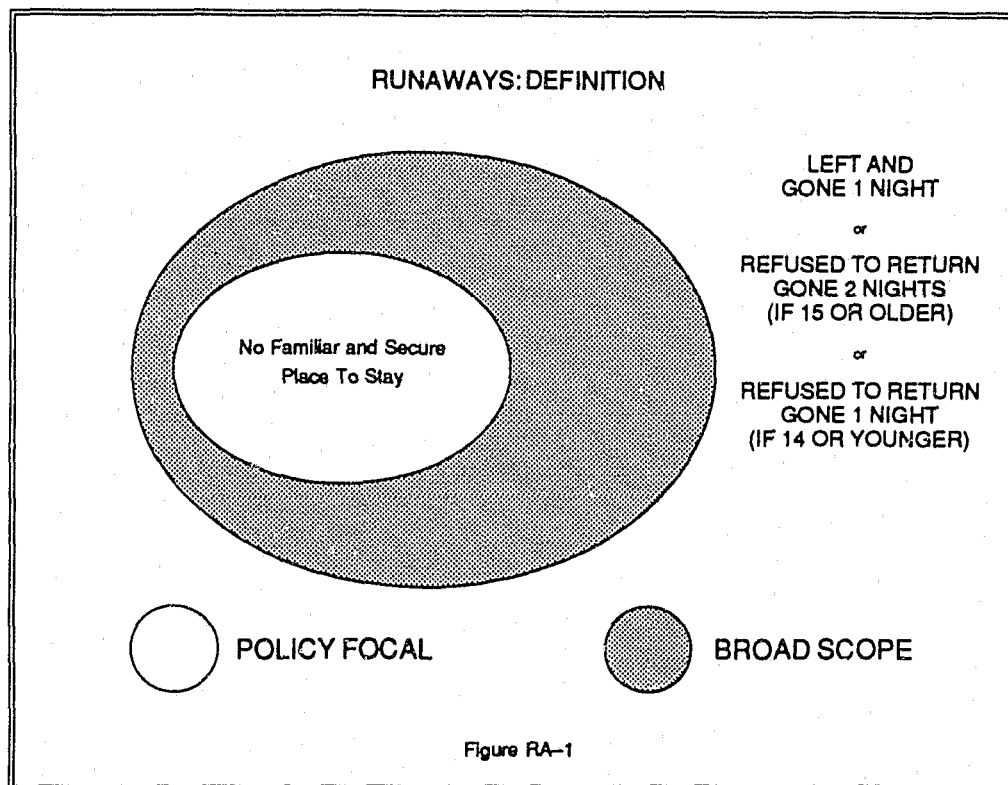
⁶ Brennan, T., Blanchard, F., Huizinga, D., & Elliott, D. (1976). The incidence and nature of runaway behavior: Final report. Boulder, CO: Behavior Research and Evaluation Corporation.

child is without a familiar and secure place to stay (Figure RA-1).⁷ Thus, a child who runs away and stays at a friend's house or with a relative, even for several nights, is a Broad Scope Runaway, but not Policy Focal. By contrast a child who runs away for the same period and stays for some time on the street or in a car or even in a runaway shelter would be a Policy Focal Runaway.

Runaway Gesture. If a child stayed away only a few hours, but not overnight, even if he or she left a "runaway note," we called this a Runaway Gesture, and we did not include it in the incidence figures for runaways. We also excluded certain cases of older children who stayed away overnight because in most people's minds these cases are not seen as serious enough to constitute running away. For example, among older adolescents in contemporary America, there is a relatively common form of rebellion that entails going to a party or rock concert and "forgetting to come back" until the next morning. If children 15 years or older, then, were out initially with permission but stayed overnight when they were not supposed to, the episode was defined only as a Runaway Gesture, not a countable instance of running away. Runaway Gestures are important in their own right as indicators of family conflict but are different enough to warrant exclusion from the national estimate of the number of runaways.⁸

⁷ The judgment about security was made by the researchers, not the child or caretaker. See report on Household Survey Methodology.

⁸ Some of these Runaway Gestures were countable under the criteria for Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing episodes.



Overall, this definitional approach is both broader and narrower than prior definitions of runaway behavior. It is broader on at least two dimensions:

1) It not only includes children who leave home without parental permission but also those who are already away from home with permission and fail to return in violation of clear expectations.

2) It includes children who run not just from households but also from a variety of nonhousehold settings. Prior surveys of runaways have largely asked about leaving home. But this leaves out an important group of runaways: children who have run away from a juvenile residential facility such as a group foster home, detention center, or mental hospital.

There are also three ways that our definitions are narrower than prior ones:

1) Previous attempts to estimate the number of runaways have also included in their counts many children who, in our opinion, would be better described as thrown away. Thrownaways are an important and distinct category of displaced children who deserve separate consideration. NISMART has made a separate estimate of the incidence of the Thrownaway problem in Chapter 6.

2) Some previous studies have included Runaways who were gone for less than an overnight. These are events that tell us much about family life but were not counted in our estimate of runaway behavior. The inclusion of the category of "Runaway Gestures" allows us to measure the extent of these episodes without diluting the concept of running away.

3) Finally, our definitions have introduced certain age requirements that are somewhat narrower than earlier definitions. Overnight episodes involving 15- to 17-year-olds who failed to return might have been included under earlier definitions of runaway but were excluded from our counts.⁹

Brief Review of Data Sources

Three methodologies have been used in the NISMART studies to both estimate and refine the incidence of runaways.

Household survey. The primary estimate is derived from the national household telephone survey of 10,544 caretakers of 20,505

⁹ Some of these qualified as Otherwise Missing episodes, however.

children¹⁰ under the age of 18. The design of this survey was extensively described in Chapter 2. In the case of runaways, as with other episodes, screener questions were used to probe for possible cases. A runaway episode could come to our attention in responses to any one of three questions:

1) "In the last year did [any of these children] leave home without permission and stay away for at least a few hours?"

2) "Did [any of these children] choose not to come home from somewhere when they were supposed to and stay away for at least 2 nights?"

3) "Was there any time when you were concerned because you couldn't find [any of these children] or they didn't come home?"

If respondents answered "yes" to any of these screener questions, they were asked an extended series of questions about the episode, which allowed us to determine whether it met the definitional requirements for a Runaway.

One advantage of this approach is that it permitted us to go beyond official counts of runaways; i.e., cases known only to police or social welfare agencies. Many runaway children may never be reported or come to the attention of an agency. If past research is an accurate barometer, an agency-based records approach

¹⁰ Because of earlier research showing virtually no runaways under age 10 (e.g., ORC, 1976) the Runaway screen questions were actually only asked in households that had a child age 7 or older, and in certain waves only of a certain subsample. However, Runaway episodes could also come to the study's attention through other questions that were asked of every household with children (e.g., screener #13), so potentially any child could have qualified. In actuality, no child under 7 was reported as a Runaway.

would significantly undercount the true incidence of runaways in comparison to a household survey.

Another advantage of interviewing caretakers is that it made it possible to collect information on the details of runaway episodes that might not be available in agency records. For example: whether the child left with other people; how far the child traveled; and, especially, what the parents did after they became aware of the child's absence. Caretaker interviews may not be as reliable as child interviews on these matters but they are better than agency records.

An additional strength of this approach was that it asked caretakers about "leaving" or "failing to return" rather than asking about "running away." Many caretakers, for one reason or another, may not want to label the actions of the child as running away, even though it would meet our definition and that of others regarding such an act.

Of course, a household survey approach that uses caretakers as respondents is not without problems. A clear drawback of this approach is the reliance upon the caretaker as the sole reporting source of children's behavior. Undoubtedly, some caretakers did not reveal all they knew and others may simply not have known about runaway episodes.

A second obvious limitation of this methodology is its inability to count runaway behavior from nonhousehold settings. Children in institutional settings and those who reside for at least part of the year in juvenile facilities are an important group of children overlooked by household survey methodologies.

To compensate for this latter limitation, a second methodology was used.

Juvenile Facility Study. In order to count children who ran away from nonhousehold settings, we conducted a national survey of 126 juvenile facilities where children resided for part or all of the study year. Facilities such as summer camps, boarding schools, group foster homes, detention centers, and mental health and medical hospitals were included in the sample. Informants at each facility provided us with data concerning the number of children who resided there during 1988 as well as the number of children who left the facility without permission or failed to return to the facility from some temporary time away.

Since some children ran from both a household and a residential facility during 1988, we had to be careful to avoid double counting. We checked for this possibility by collecting data on the proportion of children who resided at the institution who did not have a household to which to return and then, for each runaway child, we collected information on whether he/she had lived in a household during 1988 and whether he/she ran away from that household during that year. These data allowed us to make an unduplicated addition to the estimate of runaways generated from the Household Survey.

Returned Runaway Study. The primary purpose of this study was to evaluate the validity of parental responses and to examine the extent of agreement between parents and children regarding the details of runaway experiences. If a parent in a survey household reported a runaway episode and if the child had returned to the

household, the parent was asked for permission to interview that child at a later time. An additional group of parents who reported no runaway event during the last year were also asked to permit a follow-up interview with their teenaged child. Overall, 227 children were interviewed, 85 returned runaways and 142 others.

The Incidence Estimates

Household Survey Incidence Estimate. We estimate that in 1988, there were 446,700 Broad Scope Runaways from households. Of this number, 129,500 were Policy Focal Runaways (Table RA-1 and Figure RA-2). Policy Focal children were, by definition, without a familiar and safe place to stay while away from the household.¹¹

An additional 173,700 children were classified as having made a runaway gesture. These were children who left the household without permission but did not stay away overnight and older children who were initially out with permission but stayed out overnight only to return home the next day.

¹¹ Rates for Runaways are shown on the basis of children 0-17, even though there were no young runaways, in order to allow these rates to be compared with rates for other NISMART categories.

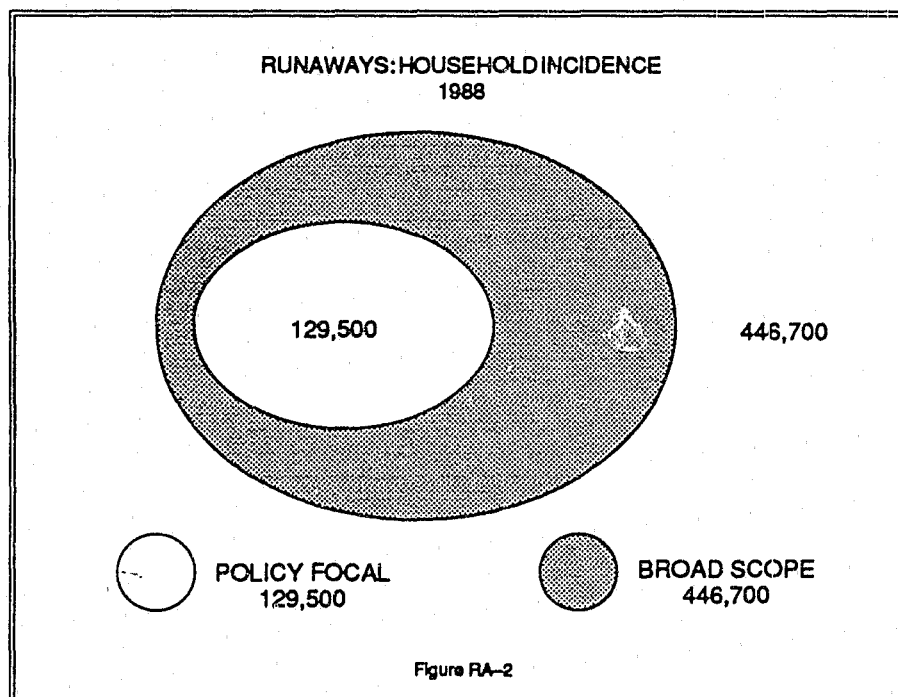
Table RA-1. Estimated National Incidence of Runaway Children, 1988

	Number of Children	Rate per 1,000 Children 0-17
<u>Household Survey (HS)</u>		
Broad Scope ^a	446,700	7.08
Policy Focal	129,500	2.05
Runaway Gestures ^b	173,700	2.75
<u>Juvenile Facility Survey (JFS)</u>		
Total (Policy Focal) Runaways from Juvenile Facilities only ^c	12,800	.20
	4,000	.06
<u>HS & JFS Combined</u>		
Total Broad Scope ^a	450,700	7.14
Total Policy Focal	133,500	2.11

^a Includes Policy Focal

^b Not included in Broad Scope or Policy Focal

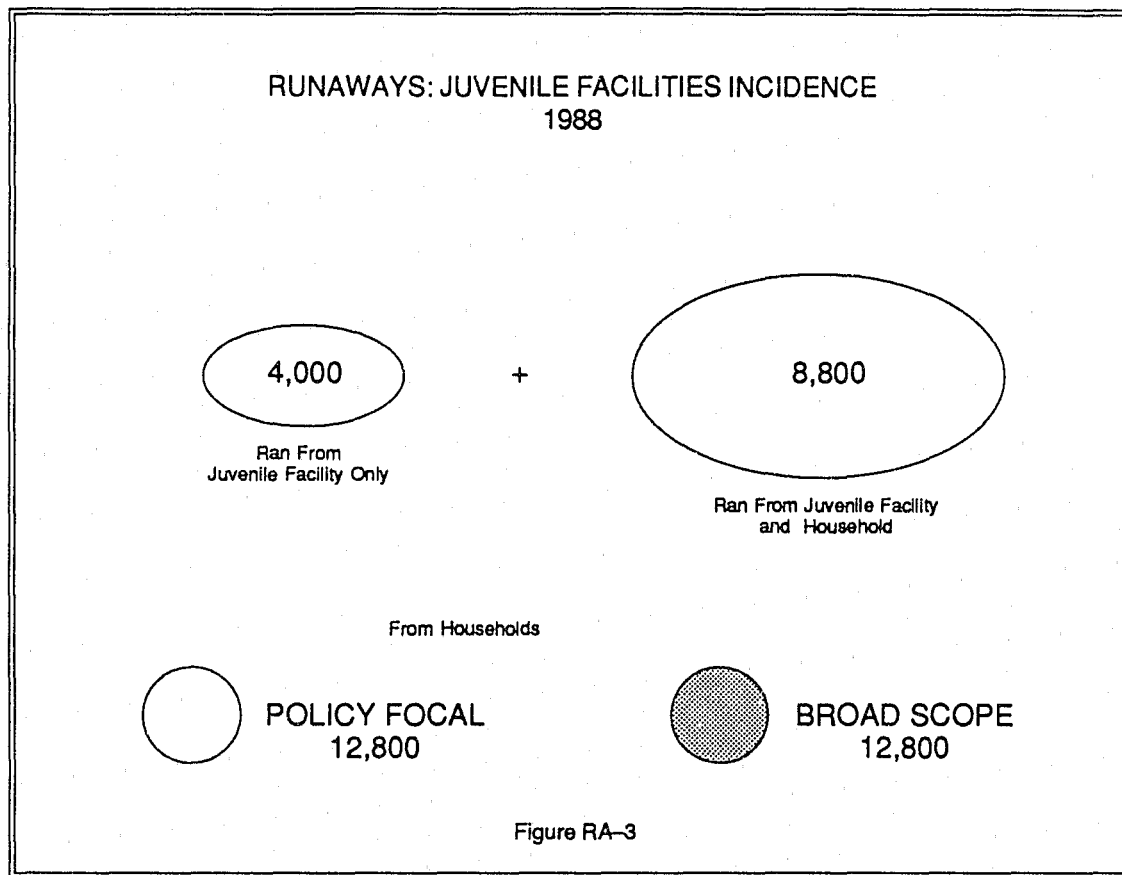
^c Many runaways from juvenile facilities also ran in the same year from a household, so only "Runaways from JF only" may be added to Household estimates to form an unduplicated joint estimate



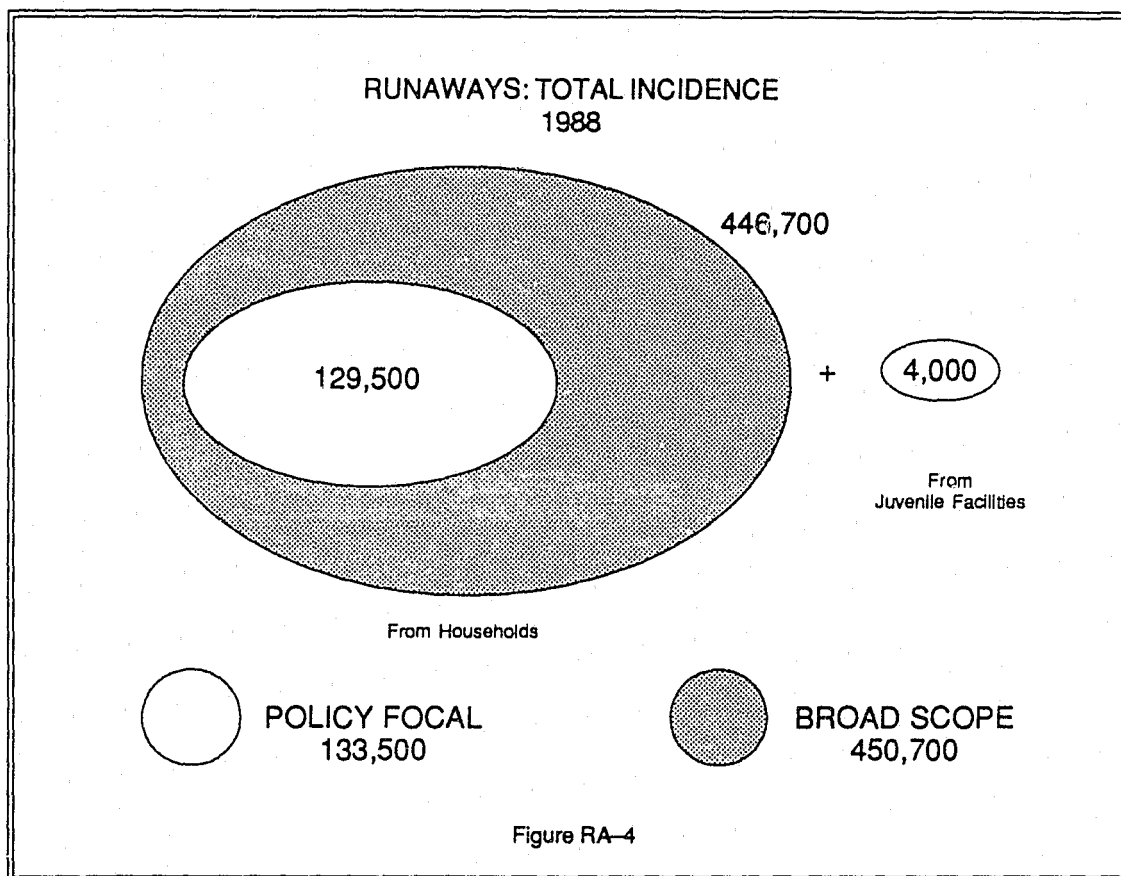
Juvenile Facility Incidence Estimate. Based on our survey of residential facilities, we estimate that 12,800 children ran away from these sites in 1988 (Figure RA-3). We considered all institutional runaways as Policy Focal for two reasons. First, many of the institutions in our survey housed children who, for one reason or another, were already of great policy interest. They included children with physical or mental disabilities, drug-dependent children, children with serious mental health problems and abused and neglected children placed in these facilities by the State. Runaways from these groups were considered at greater risk of harm and were thus classified as Policy Focal. Second, it was difficult in many instances to determine whether facility runaways had a familiar and safe place to stay while on the run. Many staff we interviewed told us they had little knowledge about what had happened to these children during their runaway episodes.

Unduplicated Runaway Incidence Estimate. Many children who ran away from juvenile facilities had also run away from their households in 1988. In fact, nearly two-thirds of the JFS runaways had been household runaways as well. This was a surprising finding about JFS runaways but one that made a great deal of sense. One of the main reasons children end up in juvenile facilities is for behavior associated with running away. Children who have run away from households and then are placed in institutions will be inclined to run away again, because they know the ropes. But in order to make an unduplicated national estimate of runaways from households and facilities we had to avoid counting such children twice. To eliminate double-counting, we could only add to our

household estimate those children from facilities who did not also run away from a household during the study year. An estimated 4,000 children met this criterion.



Thus, we estimate that 450,700 children ran away at least once in 1988 from either a household or from a juvenile residential facility. Of this number, 133,500, or about 30 percent, were classified as Policy Focal (Figure RA-4). This latter group included all children who ran from a nonhousehold setting and children who ran away from home and were without a familiar and safe place to stay during part or all of their time away.



This annual estimate of 450,700 Broad Scope Runaways may appear lower than previous estimates,^{12,13,14} which have ranged from 700,000 to more than 1 million. For example, the most frequently cited previous runaway figure was 733,000 runaways from a national incidence study conducted 13 years earlier.¹⁵ Although the household portion of NISMART is similar in design to the 1975 study, there are three important differences that may account for the lower NISMART estimate. The first difference is demographic. Today, there are fewer teenagers than when data was collected for

¹² Opinion Research Corporation. Op. cit.

¹³ Gold & Reimer. Op. cit.

¹⁴ Behavior Research and Evaluation Corporation. Op. cit.

¹⁵ Opinion Research Corporation. Op. cit.

this earlier study in 1975. The population of 10- to 17-year-olds in the United States shrank from 33,200,000 in 1975 to 27,200,000 in 1987, a reduction of 18 percent.^{16,17} A similar rate of running in 1988 today would yield a smaller number than 13 years earlier.

A second reason for the appearance of a lower NISMART estimate is the removal from the Runaway count of children who did not run but were forced out of their households. NISMART distinguished such children from Runaways and put most of them in the separate and distinct category of Throwaways. This was not the case in the 1975 ORC study. The single screener question that was used to count Runaways could not exclude Throwaways. The authors of the 1975 report acknowledge the fact that many of the children included in the runaway estimate were, in fact, forced out of their household or told they were not wanted. Thus, the 1975 estimate should be seen more as an estimate of both runaways and throwaways than solely of runaways.

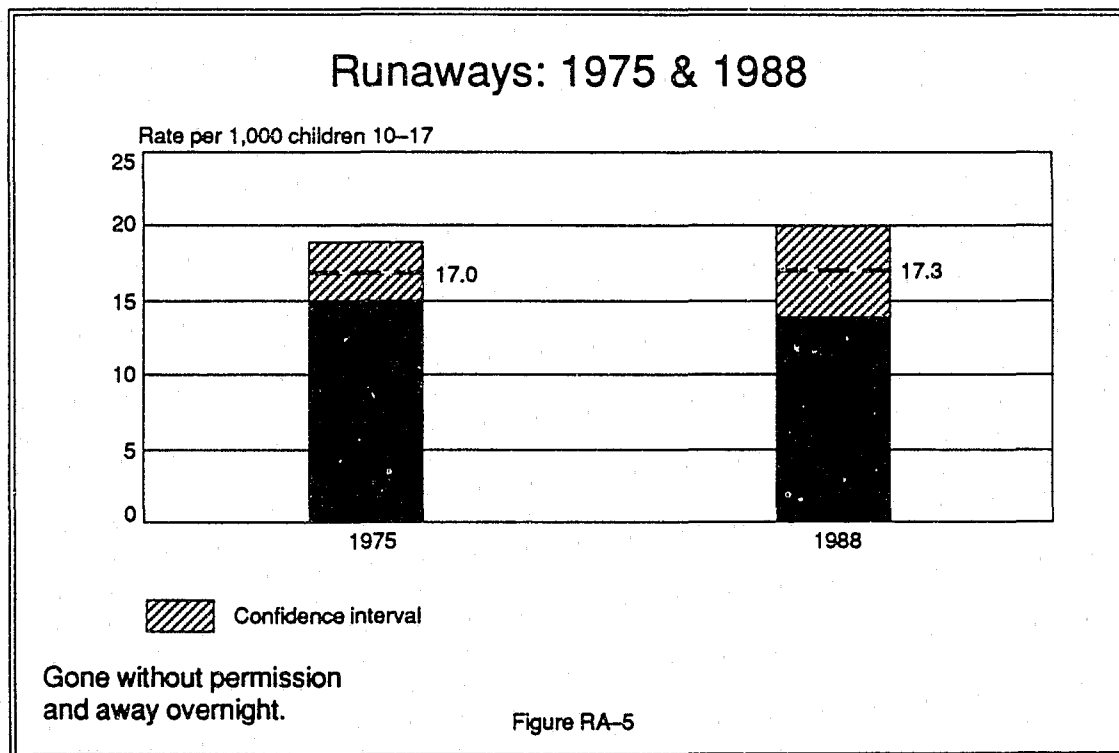
A third reason for a lower NISMART estimate is that each of the NISMART episodes was carefully evaluated in all of its details against the extremely detailed study definitions. By contrast, the 1975 study (and other runaway surveys) used a much less refined operationalization of the concept of running away.

In spite of these differences we can, with some manipulation, directly compare the two national studies to assess any change in rates between 1975 and 1988. NISMART included, as one of its

¹⁶ U.S. Bureau of the Census (1988). Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1989 (109th ed.). Washington, DC.

¹⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census (1977). Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1976 (98th ed.). Washington, DC.

screeners, the same exact question used in the 1975 study to gauge the extent of running away. The question asked whether a child in the household left home without permission and stayed away overnight. When a rate was calculated for the NISMART survey in exactly the same way as for the 1975 survey, the studies had the same rates. The 1975 study estimated that about 17 out of every 1,000 children age 10- to 17-years-old ran away from home in 1975, with a margin of error of two children per thousand. The NISMART estimate, calculated in the same way, is 17.3 out of every 1,000 children, plus or minus 3 children per thousand (Figure RA-5).¹⁸



¹⁸ This rate of 17.3 runaways per 1,000 children is not the actual NISMART runaway estimate. It only represents the rate that would have been generated in NISMART had we used the same exact criteria to count runaways as were used in the 1976 study. Note that this rate is much higher than the rate in Table RA-1, for reasons explained earlier and also because the base being used is children 10-17, not children 0-17 as in Table RA-1. The 0-17 base is used in Table RA-1 to facilitate comparison with other types of episodes in NISMART.

There is no support here for the idea that the rate of running away is higher in 1988 than in 1975. The data cannot assess any trend or fluctuation in running away during the 13-year interval, but the rates at the beginning and end of the period indicate that children ran in 1988 at the same rate as their earlier counterparts.

Demographics of Household Runaways

Older children make up the vast majority of Runaways. Over two-thirds of the children who ran away from their households in 1988 were 16 or 17 years old (Table RA-2). Running away was rare among children under 11 years old and became more frequent as age increased. This is an age distribution very similar to the one reported in the 1975 Runaway study.¹⁹

¹⁹ Comparisons between NISMART and the 1975 ORC study should be treated with caution because of methodological and definitional differences between the two studies.

Table RA-2. Age and Sex of Broad Scope Runaway Children

Age	Runaway	U.S. Pop
	% (Unweighted N=129) (Weighted N=446,700)	%
0 - 6	0% ^a	38%
7 ^b - 10	2% ^a	21%
11 ^b - 13	7%	15%
14 ^b - 15	24%	10%
16 ^b - 17	68%	16%
Sex		
Boys	42%	51%
Girls	58%	49%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

^b Some children who were this age at the time of the study were a year younger at the time of the episode.

More girls than boys ran away from their households in 1988. The difference is conspicuous (58% to 42%) but not statistically significant in this sample. The excess of female runaways was not apparent in the 1975 study. In fact, the proportion of female to male runaways was at that time roughly equal.

A higher number of female runaways has been found in studies of runaway shelters throughout the 1980's. These studies^{20,21} consistently found six girls for every four boys among runaways

²⁰ The National Network of Runaway and Youth Services, Inc. (1985). To whom do they belong: A profile of America's runaway and homeless youth and the programs that help them. Washington, DC.

²¹ Jorgenson, S., Thornburg, H., & Williams, J. (1980). The experience of running away: Perceptions of adolescents seeking help in a shelter case facility. High School Journal, 12, 87-96.

seeking services. This may be due to a greater disposition on the part of females to seek help for a wide variety of problems rather than a greater tendency to run away.^{22,23} If more girls than boys are running away from home today than 13 years ago, the situation may be related to an increase in female rule violation in general.²⁴

Table RA-3. Family Structure of Households With Broad Scope Runaways

	Runaway % (Unweighted N=129) (Weighted N=446,700)	U.S. Pop %
Both parents	28%*	67%
Single parent, no partner	22%	16%
Single parent, w/ partner	27%*	7%
Neither parent	7% ^a	3%
DK/NA ^b	15%	8%

- ^a Based on fewer than 10 cases
^b Don't Know / Not Acertained
* Differs from population estimate
-

Children were less likely to run from households where both parents (natural or adoptive) were present. The data in Table RA-3²⁵ show that runaways left in particularly disproportionate numbers from families with step-parents and live-in boyfriends or girlfriends.

²² Hotaling, G.T. (1984). Gender and mental health: An analysis and reinterpretation. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH.

²³ Kessler, R.C., Brown, R.L., & Bromman, C.L. (1981). Sex differences in psychiatric help-seeking: Evidence from four large-scale surveys. Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 22, 49-64.

²⁴ Adler, F. (1981). The incidence of female criminology in the contemporary world. New York: New York University Press.

²⁵ See Chapter 3, footnote #30.

There were no strong racial differences in running away for whites and blacks and no differences by income (Table RA-4).

Table RA-4. Race and Household Income of Broad Scope Runaway Children

	Runaway % (Unweighted N=129) (Weighted N=446,700)	U.S. Pop %
Race		
White	74%	71%
Black	20%	15%
Hispanic	4% ^{a*}	11%
Other	2% ^a	3%
Income		
< \$10,000	13%	15%
\$10,000 - \$20,000	24%	20%
\$20,000 - \$30,000	19%	25%
\$30,000 - \$40,000	21%	19%
\$40,000 ⁺	24%	22%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

* Differs from population estimate

Runaways seemed to more frequently come from cold-weather States (a higher proportion of runaways were from the Northeast and the Midwest and a lower proportion of runaways were from the South and the West). This pattern was not statistically significant. In the western States, however, there were significantly fewer runaways than would be expected on the basis of child population size (Table RA-5).

Table RA-5. Region and Community Type of Broad Scope Runaway Children

	Runaway %	U.S. Pop %
	(Unweighted N=129)	
	(Weighted N=446,700)	
<hr/>		
Region		
Northeast	25%	19%
Midwest	34%	25%
South	26%	35%
West	15%*	21%
<hr/>		
Community Type		
Large city	18%	18%
Suburb	18%	18%
Large town	14%	18%
Small town	31%	27%
Rural area	19%	19%

* Differs from population estimate

Table RA-6. Month, Day, and Time of Broad Scope Runaways' Episodes

Runaway
%
(Unweighted N=129)
(Weighted N=446,700)

Month

January	10% ^a
February	7%
March	5% ^a
April	8%
May	7%
June	12%
July	10%
August	18%
September	5% ^a
October	6%
November	6% ^a
December	6%

Day

Weekday	68%
Weekend	16%
DK	16%

Time of Day

Morning	20%
Afternoon	28%
Evening	31%
Night	17%
DK	5% ^a

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Characteristics of Household Runaway Episodes

The seasonal peak for Broad Scope Runaways occurred in the summer with August being the most frequent single month. During nonsummer months, more children ran away in January than in any other month. Weekends were not disproportionately represented over

weekdays. Most episodes started in the afternoon and evening (Table RA-6).

Arguments immediately preceded the episodes for one-third of the Runaways (Table RA-7). These arguments most often involved "normal" parent-child issues such as house rules, friends, school and staying out late. As the data in Table RA-7 show, runaway episodes were not often precipitated by issues involving drug use, sex, or criminal behavior, although these issues might have been part of a long-standing conflict between parents and children. Along with arguments, there was physical violence in 10 percent of the episodes.

Table RA-7. Type of Argument Prior to Episode for Broad Scope Runaway

Runaway %	
(Unweighted N=129) (Weighted N=446,700)	
Argument prior to episode	33%
About	
House rules ^a	30%
Friends	24%
School	20%
Staying out late	16%
Dress / appearance	6%
Sex	4% ^b
Alcohol	3% ^b
Drugs	2% ^b
Criminal behavior	2% ^b
Other	13%
Physical violence ^c	10%

^a Percentages do not sum to 100%, because of possible multiple issues

^b Fewer than 10 cases

^c By anyone involved in the argument

Only 34 percent of the children specifically stated in some way that they were leaving home or not returning home, but most had a clear destination in mind when they ran. Most Runaways (80%) actually ended up spending at least part of the time during the episode at a friend's house. Many Runaways (79%) were also accompanied by others during the episode. Data in Table RA-8 show that only 2 percent of the Runaways spent any time at a runaway shelter²⁶ and only 11 percent were without a place to sleep during some night while away from home. (The finding that 29 percent of

²⁶ Parents may not have been fully aware of such events.

the episodes were Policy Focal, i.e., without a familiar and secure place to stay, reflects the fact that even those who spent time at the home of friends and relatives were not necessarily there the whole time and also that some of those homes were judged not to have been secure.)

Table RA-8. Destination of Broad Scope Runaways

	Runaway %
	(Unweighted N=129) (Weighted N=446,700)
<hr/>	
Initial destination	
Friend's house	60%
Relative's house	6%
Other	7%
DK	26%
At any time at	
Friend's house	80%
Relative's house	14%
Runaway shelter	2% ^a
DK	13%
Any night without	
Place to sleep	11%
DK	13%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

These findings do not differ from those reported in the 1975 study. In both studies, the majority of children knew where they were going and spent most of their time at the home of a friend or relative; very few utilized a runaway shelter. One disturbing finding from NISMART is the fact that in 11 percent of the episodes

the caretakers reported that their children were without a place to sleep on at least 1 night during the episode and, in another 13 percent, we or they did not know whether their child slept in a secure environment. It is possible that close to a fifth of the episodes studied in this report involved a child sleeping in a car, on the street, in the woods, the beach, or some other unsecured place.

There were several measures of the seriousness of these runaway episodes including distance traveled, whether the children left the State, how long they were gone and whether or not they returned, the number of children who ran more than once in 1988, whether the police were contacted, and whether the child suffered harm during the episode. These characteristics appear in Tables RA-9 through RA-13.

Most Runaways did not travel far from home (Table RA-9), and only 7 percent left the State during their episodes, as far as the caretakers knew. Most Runaways in our sample had relatively short episodes, with 49 percent of them returning within 2 days (Table RA-10). Ten percent of the Runaway children had not yet returned home when we talked to caretakers, and an additional 16 percent had been gone for 2 or more weeks.²⁷

²⁷ If an episode lasted more than a year, it is likely that we would not have heard about it, since we asked only about episodes that began in the last year. So Table RA-10 may slightly undercount really long-term episodes. But it is also apparent from Table RA-10 how few episodes lasted anywhere close to a whole year.

Table RA-9. Distance Traveled Away From Home by Broad Scope Runaways

	Runaway %
	(Unweighted N=129) (Weighted N=446,700)
<hr/>	
Distance	
More than 100 miles	10%
51 - 100	6% ^a
11 - 50	31%
2 - 1	38%
1 or less	7% ^a
DK	8%
Out of State	7%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Table RA-10. Length of Absence of Broad Scope Runaways

	Runaway %
	(Unweighted N=129) (Weighted N=446,700)
<hr/>	
Overnight, but 24 hours or less	26%
1 - 2 days	23%
3 - 6 days	14%
1 week, but less than 2 weeks	9% ^a
2 weeks, but less than 4 weeks	12%
4 weeks or more	4% ^a
Not yet returned	10%
DK	3%
At least one additional episode occurred in last 12 months	34%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Over one-third of the children (34%) who ran away from their household in 1988 had also run away on prior occasions during the year.

One gauge of the seriousness of an episode was whether a parent or caretaker was concerned enough about the child's leaving to contact the police. For 40 percent of the Runaways, respondents actually contacted the police. While this was only a minority, it was a higher proportion than was found in the 1975 study²⁸ when only 31 percent of the runaway episodes involved police contacts (Table RA-11).

Table RA-11. Criminal Justice Involvement With Broad Scope Runaways

	Runaway % (Unweighted N=129) (Weighted N=446,700)
Police contacted by caretaker	40%
Child in juvenile detention center	8%
Child in jail	1% ^a

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

We questioned caretakers about the extent of harm suffered by children during runaway episodes (Table RA-12). There are obvious limitations to these data, and they should be interpreted cautiously since children may have been particularly reluctant to disclose some harm, like sexual abuse; thus parents may not have known about some of the harm they suffered. But, according to

²⁸ Opinion Research Corporation. Op cit.

caretakers, 3 percent of Runaways were sexually abused while away from home and another 1 percent experienced an attempted sexual victimization. Only 1 percent of Runaways experienced physical harm based on parental accounts, but this type of information may have been especially vulnerable to underreporting.

Table RA-12. Harm to Broad Scope Runaways

	Runaway %
	(Unweighted N=129) (Weighted N=446,700)
<hr/>	
Sexually Abused	
Yes	3% ^a
Attempt	1% ^a
No	80%
DK/NA	7% ^a
Physically Abused	
Yes	<1% ^a
No	88%
DK/NA	11%
Physically Harmed	
Yes	1% ^a
No	91%
DK/NA	8% ^a
Mentally Harmed	
Serious	6%
Mild	1%
Minor	8%
None	74%
DK whether or degree	10%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Parents were also asked to assess whether their child experienced mental harm as a result of the episode. Again, this is highly subjective, but 15 percent of the caretakers did report that some degree of such harm was experienced by the Runaway children.

These measures of harm are probably underestimates given the fact that not all children would disclose such information to parents upon their return home. Also, at the time of the parental interview, 10 percent of the Runaways had not yet returned. This group of children may have been at most risk to harm.

The seriousness of household Runaways can be summarized as follows. About 3 out of 10 Broad Scope Runaways were classified as Policy Focal because the child was without a familiar and safe place to stay at some time during the course of the runaway episode. Parents or caretakers contacted the police for 4 out of 10 Runaways. Roughly 3 out of 10 of these Runaways were gone at least a week, and 1 out of 10 had not returned at the time of the interview with the parent. Less than 1 child out of 10 left the State and less than 2 out of every 10 traveled farther than 50 miles from their households. About 15 percent of the parents or guardians reported that the Runaway child experienced mental harm while 3 percent of parents told us that the Runaway was sexually abused during the episode.

For 48 percent of Runaways, the caretakers said that they knew where their children were more than half the time during the episode (Table RA-13). Twenty-seven percent did not know the whereabouts of the child at any time. Overall, the whereabouts of

about 46 percent (19% + 27%) of Runaways were not known to their caretakers during most of the time the child was away.

Table RA-13. Whereabouts Known and Companionship of Broad Scope Runaways

	Runaway %
	(Unweighted N=129) (Weighted N=446,700)
<hr/>	
Caretaker knew whereabouts of child	
Most of the time	39%
More than half the time	9%
Less than half the time	19%
Not at all	27%
DK / NA	6% ^a
Child accompanied by others	79%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

The Accuracy of Household Runaway Estimates

It was especially important in this study to examine the accuracy of the information obtained, not only because we were seeking information on sensitive family topics (runaway and throwaway behavior, for example) but also because we based our national estimates on information obtained from caretakers alone. Since we relied exclusively on one point of view about very complicated issues, two important questions had to be addressed. First, did parents and caretakers tell us about all episodes? Second, did parents and caretakers accurately portray the episodes they reported to us? In particular, did they give us accurate enough information to correctly classify the event as a Runaway

episode, a Throwaway episode, a Runaway Gesture, or an episode that would not be counted by our definitional criteria?

Both of these issues could be addressed with the Returned Runaway Sample. This sample was more fully described in Chapter 2 but a few points can be restated here. It was not a random sample of all children who were reported to have run away or been throwaway during 1988. The sample was limited to children who returned to the household, whose parents gave us permission to talk with them, and who themselves agreed to be interviewed. We also interviewed a sample of children whose parents reported that they had not run away or been throwaway during 1988. This sample of nonepisode children was interviewed to check on underreporting of episodes by parents.

How Much Agreement Was There Between Parents and Children About Whether a Runaway or Throwaway Event Occurred in 1988?

In 85 episode cases in which we interviewed both a caretaker and the episode child, there was 95 percent agreement (80 of the 85 cases) that some kind of event (a runaway or throwaway episode, runaway gesture, or some leaving that we later classified as "not countable") did happen. Parents and children did seem equally likely to admit to interviewers that an "event" had occurred.

What about the child whose parents did not report a runaway or throwaway episode for 1988? In 139 of 141 cases in which we spoke to both parent and child and the parent did not report some episode, the child agreed. Two children reported a runaway episode that their caretakers failed to disclose. Thus, in close to 99

percent of the sample, there was agreement between the parent/caretaker and the child that no episode of the sort we were looking for happened during the study year.

Did Parents and Children Give Us the Same Information When They Reported an Episode?

Even though there was a high level of agreement between caretakers and children that something happened, specifics about the episode may have been recollected or revealed differently. For example, a parent might have given us the details of an episode that led to it being classified as a Broad Scope Runaway incident, but when we interviewed the child, the specifics of his/her account led to its classification as a Broad Scope Throwaway incident.

This appears to have been the case. The results in Table RA-14 indicate that accounts of runaway and throwaway events differed between caretakers and children. Based upon the caretakers' accounts, 36 of the 85 children met the definitional requirements to be classified as Runaways. However, there were 15 additional cases that were not countable Runaway cases based on the caretaker's account but would have been countable on the basis of the child's account. Four of these 15 cases that failed the Runaway criteria from the caretaker's account were countable cases in other categories of displaced children (two were Lost/Injured and two were Throwaways).

Table RA-14. Changes to Classification of Children Based on Child's Account Rather Than Caretaker's - Returned Runaway Study

Number of Countable <u>Runaways</u> - Based on Caretakers' Accounts	36
Children not counted using caretaker's account who would have been included based on child's account	+ 15
How categorized with caretaker's account	
(11 no countable episode)	
(2 Lost/Injured)	
(2 Throwaways)	
Children counted using caretaker's account who would <u>not</u> have been included based on child's account	- 11
How would be categorized with child's account	
(8 Throwaways)	
(2 no countable episode)	
(1 Runaway Gesture)	
Net change if we had only interviewed child	+ 4

Moreover, there were 11 children whom we counted as Runaways on the basis of caretaker accounts but who would not have been countable on the basis of child reports. Most of these disagreements (8 out of 11) were due to the child disclosing information that would have led us to classify their episode as a Throwaway, not a Runaway as suggested by the caretaker accounts.

All in all, caretakers and children did give accounts that differed in important details. The impact of this problem is most acute when a term like "runaway" is defined according to specific details. In such a case small disagreements can make a difference in whether or not an episode gets counted.

Data in Table RA-14 indicate that if the incidence of Runaways was based exclusively on child disclosures, the estimate would have been approximately 11 percent higher than the one based on what caretakers disclosed.²⁹

Demographics of Juvenile Facility Runaways

We estimated that 12,800 children ran away in 1988 from juvenile residential facilities. However, this estimate may be low. There were several places in this pioneering methodology where we may have missed children that should have been counted. First, it must be remembered that we obtained our sample of juvenile facilities only when caretakers in a household nominated them, telling us that a child from that household spent 2 weeks or more in such a place. But not all children in institutions have households that could have nominated them, and in fact, some institutions may be made up largely of children without households. Moreover, children in institutions may come disproportionately from households that refused to participate or that we could not locate. Or caretakers with such children may have declined to discuss them or to give us information to locate their institutions. All this means that our estimate of the number of children who spent 2 weeks of the year in some juvenile facility (956,700 in total and 546,800 if we exclude summer camps) may be low and thus lead us to underestimate the incidence of Runaways from such facilities.

²⁹ The 11 percent figure is an approximation because it was based only on the returned runaways and, as such, it is a nonprobability sample. Because of this, it cannot be weighted to produce a national estimate of underreporting.

Second, we had a fairly sizable number of nominated juvenile facilities that we could not locate or that failed to participate. The children who ran away from these institutions may be missing from our count as well.

Finally, even from the facilities that did participate, we may have not been told about every single runaway. The respondents from these facilities were, in some cases, given the task of accounting for the experiences of hundreds of children over a whole year's time. This is far different from the burden in the Household Survey where we asked a caretaker about the two or three children in their home. Institutional respondents may not have remembered or may not have had records about all events, so it seems very probable that many institutional runaways were missed.

We take the estimate of 12,800 runaways from juveniles facilities to be a minimum estimate. It does tell us that the problem exists. It is also the first such estimate to be attempted of a problem that has hardly been studied before, and thus there are no other figures against which to compare it.

Nonetheless, the distribution of runaways by the type of facility in which they were living (Table JF-1) is extremely plausible. By far the largest group of runaways from juvenile facilities came from group foster homes, which also have the highest rate per 1,000. These facilities are numerous in all States and are settings that house many runaway-prone children (e.g., children who were too challenging for foster parents). Residential treatment centers are not so numerous but have rates of running away similar to those of group foster homes. According

to one analyst,³⁰ in recent years, residential treatment centers have been frequently used by families to deal with chronic runaway children. Mental health facilities and juvenile detention centers work with similarly high-risk youths but have substantially lower rates of running away, perhaps because these institutions often operate as secure and locked facilities. Boarding schools have relatively low rates of running away, but because there are many children in such facilities they contribute about 14 percent of the total. Medical hospitals and schools for the disabled have very low rates, as might be expected, and overnight camps had virtually none at all detectable by this methodology.

³⁰ Schwartz, I.M. (1989). (In)justice for juveniles: Rethinking the best interests of the child. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath.

Table JF-1. Estimated Number and Rate of Runaways From Juvenile Facilities by Residential Types

Type of Facility	Number of Runaways	Facility-Specific Rate of Running Away per 1,000 Children In Juvenile Facilities ^a
Group Foster Homes	4,579	173
Residential Treatment Centers	2,380	148
Mental Health Facilities	2,999	18
Juvenile Detention Centers ^b	642	14
Boarding Schools	1,850	9
Medical Hospitals	385	6
Schools for the Disabled	13	<1
Overnight Camps	0	0
Total	12,848	13
Total (without overnight camps)	12,848	24

^a Who spent at least 2 weeks at the facility

^b Estimated number of runaways in juvenile detention centers has been weighted by a factor of 4.82 to account for underreporting in household survey.

The overall rate of runaways from juvenile facilities was 13 per 1,000 children. However, this number is deceptively low because it includes children at summer camps. Summer camps account for 40 percent of all children in facilities yet had virtually no detectable runaways. Excluding summer camps, the rate of runaways from juvenile facilities climbs to 24 per 1,000. This is somewhat but not dramatically higher than the rate of runaways from households, which for 11- to 17-year-olds we estimated at around

17 per 1,000.³¹ This is an additional indication that our estimate of runaways from juvenile facilities may be low.

Tables JF-2 to JF-10 provide additional information about the children who ran away from facilities and the nature of their episodes. However, note that this information was not based on all the runaway children in all the institutions that were sampled. Rather, we obtained this detailed information on only up to the five most recent runaway episodes in each facility.³²

Children who ran from facilities were, like other runaways, primarily older adolescents. Over 90 percent were older than 13, and 51 percent were 16- or 17-years-old (Table JF-2).³³ However, these runaways were somewhat younger than runaways from households, two-thirds of whom were 16 or 17. The gender breakdown showed a roughly equal proportion of boys and girls.

A surprisingly large proportion of the runaways from juvenile facilities occurred in the South, and surprisingly small proportions occurred in the East and West. However, this cannot necessarily be interpreted as a greater (or lesser) propensity of

³¹ The rate of runaways in Table RA-1 (7 per 1,000) is calculated based on all children 0-17, but for purposes of comparison to children in facilities, who are primarily older children, we used a rate based on children 11-17.

³² However, information from this subsample of five or fewer runaways was weighted to more accurately reflect the characteristics of all runaways about whom we had information from any particular facility (see the report on Juvenile Facilities Methodology for a description of this weighting procedure).

The weighted N in Tables JF-2 through 10 is not the total of 12,848 runaways but rather 8,915 runaways because some institutions that gave us estimates of runaways did not provide characteristics of episodes.

³³ We could not obtain any data on the characteristics of all children in institutions in the United States to use as comparisons for Tables JF-2 and JF-3.

institutionalized children in these regions to run away. Unfortunately, we have no reliable figures on the regional distribution of children in facilities against which to compare this distribution. Nor do we know of any reason why rates would be different across regions. Thus, we discourage any immediate conclusions based on this regional finding.

Table JF-2. Age, Sex, and Location of Juvenile Facility Runaways

Juvenile Facility
Runaway
%
(Unweighted N=138)
(Weighted N=8,915)

Age

0 - 6	0% ^a
7 - 10	1% ^a
11 - 13	6%
14 - 15	41%
16 - 17	51%
DK	1% ^a

Sex

Boys	47%
Girls	53%

Location of Facility Where
Episodes Originated

Northeast	11%
Midwest	35%
South	44%
West	10%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

The majority of runaways from juvenile facilities came from single-parent families and families with one natural parent and partner prior to their institutional residence. Only 27 percent were reported to have been living with two natural or adoptive parents prior to coming to the facility (Table JF-3).

Table JF-3. Family Structure and Race of Juvenile Facility Runaways

	Juvenile Facility Runaway %
(Unweighted N=138) (Weighted N=8,915)	
<hr/>	
Family Structure	
Both natural/adoptive parents	27%
One natural parent and partner	31%
Single parent	23%
Other relative	6%
Foster care / other	9%
DK	4%
Race	
White	82%
Black	10%
Hispanic	6%
Other	2% ^a

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

There were also no significant racial disproportions that we could determine. Most runaways from juvenile facilities were white. Blacks and Hispanics were somewhat underrepresented in proportion to their numbers in the population at large. But we do not know the distribution by race of children in the facilities included in the study.

The Characteristics of Juvenile Facility Runaway Episodes³⁴

A majority of juvenile facility runaways traveled at least 10 miles from the facility, and 45 percent traveled 50 miles or more. When they ran, almost half the children not only left the institution but also left the State (Table JF-4).

Table JF-4. Distance Traveled Away From Institution and Whether the Child Left the State in Juvenile Facility Runaway Episodes

Juvenile Facility Runaway %	
(Unweighted N=130) (Weighted N=8,860)	
<hr/>	
Distance Traveled	
More than 100 miles	8%
50 - 99 miles	37%
10 - 49 miles	25%
0 - 9 miles	19%
DK	11%
<hr/>	
Did Child Leave the State?	(N=138)
Yes	45%
No	49%
DK	6% ^a

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Over 1 in 6 children who ran away from residential facilities was running to his or her home. Another 51 percent had as their destination the home of another relative or friend. About 16

³⁴ Respondents at institutions--even those who were "unaware of child's whereabouts during the episode"--could give us this information because the vast majority of runaways had been located or returned; see Table JF-5.

percent of respondents did not know where the runaway was headed (Table JF-5).

Table JF-5. Destination and Return Status of Juvenile Facility Runaways

Juvenile Facility Runaway %	
(Unweighted N=138) (Weighted N=8,915)	
<hr/>	
Initial Destination	
Home	17%
Friend's house	47%
Relative's house	4%
Other	16%
DK	16%
Child Found or Returned?	
Yes	92%
No	8%

At the time of the interview with facility staff, 92 percent of the children had returned to the facility or had been located and sent to another place. The whereabouts of 8 percent of runaways were unknown to staff at the time we talked with them (Table JF-5). The children who were still gone at the time of the interview had already been gone an average of 75 days.

About 17 percent of juvenile facility runaways were away for at least a week or had not yet returned to the facility (Table JF-6). About 4 of 10 had run from the same facility on a previous occasion in the prior 12 months.

Table JF-6. Length of Absence of Juvenile Facility Runaways

Juvenile Facility
Runaway
*
(Unweighted N=122)
(Weighted N=8,815)

24 hours or less	30%
1 - 2 days	24%
3 - 6 days	28%
1 week, but less than 2 weeks	4% ^a
2 weeks, but less than 4 weeks	2% ^a
4 weeks or more	3%
Still gone	8%
DK	1% ^a
<hr/>	
Another institutional episode occurred in last 12 months?	40%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

A majority of respondents knew very little about the location of the child during the runaway episode. In almost half the cases, staff at the institution were totally unaware of the whereabouts of the child (Table JF-7).

Table JF-7. Child's Whereabouts Known and Companionship for Juvenile Facility Runaways

	Juvenile Facility Runaway % (Unweighted N=132) (Weighted N=8,846)
<hr/>	
Institution knew whereabouts of child	
Most of the time	21%
More than half the time	10%
Less than half the time	20%
Not at all	47%
DK / NA	2% ^a
Child accompanied by others?	
Yes	45%
No	49%
DK	6% ^a

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

About 45 percent of the runaways from juvenile facilities were accompanied by others at the time of their departure.

Staff at residential facilities were more likely than caretakers of household runaways to report these episodes to the police. Many facilities were required to report to law enforcement; this may largely account for the 73 percent who actually did so (Table JF-8).

Table JF-8. Criminal Justice Involvement With Juvenile Facility Runaways

	Juvenile Facility Runaway %
	(Unweighted N=122) (Weighted N=3,456)
Facility contacted police	73%
Child picked up by police	34%
Child in juvenile detention center	5%
Child in jail	9%

Many children who ran from residential settings were picked up by the police. Staff respondents told us that 34 percent of their runaways were picked up. Five percent of runaways were placed in a juvenile detention center as a result of police contact, and 9 percent were placed in jails.

Table JF-9. Harm to Child During Juvenile Facility Runaway Episode

Juvenile Facility
Runaway
§
(Unweighted N=138)
(Weighted N=8,915)

Sexually Abused

Yes	7% ^a
No	72%
DK/NA	21% ^a

Physically Abused

Yes	7% ^a
No	73%
DK/NA	19%

Involved in Prostitution

Yes	5% ^a
No	75%
DK/NA	21%

Child Involved in Pornography
Production

Yes	2% ^a
No	76%
DK/NA	22%

Money Stolen From Child

Yes	2% ^a
No	78%
DK/NA	20%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Compared to household runaways, the children who ran away from institutions were more likely to get into trouble. Respondents reported that, 7 percent were sexually abused during the time away and 7 percent were physically abused. Data in Tables JF-9 and JF-

10 also indicate that about 5 percent of the runaways became involved in prostitution and 2 percent in pornography production, while 2 percent had money taken from them.

Table JF-10. Criminal and Other Acts Engaged in by Juvenile Facility Runaways

	Juvenile Facility Runaway ‡ (Unweighted N=138) (Weighted N=8,915)
<hr/>	
Used Drugs	
Yes	33%
No	35%
DK	32%
Sold Drugs	
Yes	3% ^a
No	63%
DK	34%
Burglary	2% ^a
Theft (including auto theft)	1%
Armed robbery/assault	3% ^a

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Some runaways from residential facilities engaged in more than prostitution to support themselves while on the run. Although respondents had no information about many runaways, 2 percent had committed a burglary, 1 percent a theft, and 3 percent were involved in an armed robbery or assault. One-third were known to have used drugs during the course of the episode, and 3 percent were reported to have sold drugs.

Conclusion

Several findings in this chapter deserve to be highlighted. First NISMART, like studies before it, has found that a large number of American youth in their teenage years run away from home and other places. In their Broad Scope form as we have defined them, Runaways are the most numerous of the types of children studied in this report.

However, it is a mistake to imagine that all these youth running are homeless and on the street. A great many actually run to the homes of friends and relatives. So NISMART has tried to highlight that group of Runaways who are the subject of most public policy interest and concern because they are without a familiar and secure place to stay--what we have called the Policy Focal Runaway children. This group numbers 133,500, about 30 percent of all Runaways. By identifying this particular endangered group, NISMART has placed the Runaway problem in better perspective.

Another crucial finding is that the estimated rate of running away in 1988 did not appear to differ from the estimated rate in 1975. Of course, there may have been fluctuations during the interim of which we are unaware, but the estimates at these two points do not indicate any important change. The implications of this finding vary according to a person's expectations. For those who worry that the runaway problem is getting worse, this is presumably good news. For those who despair that their toils have made little difference, the news may be discouraging.

There is a fourth important conclusion: Runaways are not automatically "missing children." In only 28 percent of the

household episodes did caretakers not know the whereabouts of the Runaway children at any time. In half the episodes, caretakers knew the whereabouts half the time or more. This illustrates why it is mistaken to group all Runaways as missing children. It also highlights that the problem with Runaway children is not that they are missing, but that they are not where they are supposed to be.

NISMART also uncovered an aspect of the Runaway problem that has been previously known but neglected. Runaways tend to come disproportionately from families where a parent has remarried or taken on a new partner. This information might help to better focus Runaway prevention programs.

NISMART has also highlighted the problem of Runaways from Juvenile Facilities, a group of children ignored by previous studies. It turns out that, because juvenile facility runaways have so often also run away from a household as well, their unduplicated numbers do not add much to the total estimate of household runaways. But this group, whose ranks may have been somewhat underestimated in this study, is nonetheless a serious component of the Runaway problem. Institutional runaways tend to be repeat runaways, who traveled further and were more likely to have left the State. Their institutional caretakers were less likely than household caretakers to know their whereabouts. Also, children in this group occupied a disproportionate amount of police time and effort. Many were arrested and, when they were held, were more likely to have been put in juvenile detention and jail.

NISMART findings about Juvenile Facility Runaways underscore the importance of studying and developing specific policies for

this group. Children in facilities are a high-risk group with special needs. Task forces should be established and technical advice be made available to help personnel from juvenile facilities prevent children from running away and to recover those who do. The answer is not simply tighter reins on these children. Most of these children are not offenders but are in institutions because of special needs or family conflicts. They are not to be incarcerated. Rather, the goal should be to create environments that are pleasant and supportive and thus encourage them to stay.

Finally, NISMART's Returned Runaway Study holds many important implications for future research. It does appear, from comparing their reports, that caretakers and children do candidly acknowledge episodes when asked about them in telephone surveys. However, the information that one gets from different sources can be different enough to affect incidence rates and substantive conclusions, especially when precise definitions are being used. In particular, children tend to describe an important number of episodes as Throwaways that caretakers would tend to describe as Runaways. This underscores the importance in such research of getting the perspective of children as well as parents.

HOUSEHOLD RUNAWAYS SUMMARY SHEET

Incidence

- 129,500 Policy Focal children
- 446,700 Broad Scope children

Summary of Findings About Broad Scope Runaways

Profile groups

- Children 16 or 17 years old
- From families without two natural or adoptive parents

Demographics

- Lower in the Western United States

Circumstances

- More common in summer months
- Argument prior to episode in about 1/3 of cases
- Majority ran to friend's or relative's house
- Over a third of runaways had run previously

Duration

- Majority returned within 2 days
- One in 10 still gone at time of interview

Distance

- Less than 2 out of 10 traveled more than 50 miles
- Less than 1 out of 10 traveled out of State

Missing status

- Majority of caretakers knew whereabouts of child

Police contact

- 40 percent of episodes reported to police

Harm

- One out of 10 without a place to sleep sometime during episode
- 3 percent sexually abused
- 1 percent physically abused
- 15 percent experienced some degree of mental harm

JUVENILE FACILITY RUNAWAYS SUMMARY SHEET

Incidence

- 12,800 Runaways (all Policy Focal)
- 4,000 did not also run away from a household

Summary of Findings About Runaways From Juvenile Facilities

Profile groups

- Children 14 to 17 years old
- From families affected by divorce and separation

Characteristics of juvenile facilities

- Highest rates from group foster homes and residential treatment centers

Circumstances

- Most ran home or to friend or relative's house
- Four in 10 had run previously from the same facility

Duration

- Over half returned within 2 days
- 8 percent still had not returned at time of interview

Distance

- Almost half traveled 50 or more miles
- 45 percent left the State

Missing status

- Staff did not know whereabouts of almost half of runaways

Criminal justice involvement

- Almost three-quarters of episodes reported to police
- A third were picked up by police
- 5 percent placed in juvenile detention center
- 9 percent placed in jail

Harm

- 7 percent sexually abused
- 7 percent physically abused
- 5 percent involved in prostitution
- 3 percent sold drugs
- 1 percent committed theft
- 2 percent committed burglary
- 3 percent committed armed robbery/assault

Chapter 6
THROWNAWAYS

The concept of the throwaway child predates the missing child movement of the 1980's. It first gained currency among researchers and practitioners working with runaways in the early 1970's. They recognized that the term runaway suggested a voluntary departure from home when, in fact, too many homeless youth had actually been forced out. Many so-called runaways were told to leave, made to feel unwelcome, or maltreated and abused to the point where they had little other choice. Moreover, there were also homeless youth who had been literally abandoned, whose parents had moved or disappeared with no forwarding address.

These children have been described by various terms: throwaways, castaways, castouts, and pushouts.^{1,2,3,4,5,6} We prefer the term "throwaways" to refer to this overall category of children. The term "throwaway" (with no "n") connotes a quality of the child--uselessness or disposability. "Throwaway," by contrast,

¹ U.S. News and World Report. (March, 1985). "Rat Pack" Youth: Teenage Rebels in Suburbia. March 11, 51-54.

² Nye, F.I. (1980). A theoretical perspective on running away. Journal of Family Issues, 1, 274-299.

³ Burgess, A.W. (September, 1986). Youth at Risk: Understanding Runaway and Exploited Youth. Washington, DC: National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

⁴ Opinion Research Corporation (1976). National Statistical Survey on Runaway Youth. Princeton, NJ: Opinion Research Corporation.

⁵ Del Giudice, M.J., Coccozza, J.J., & Cuomo, M.R. (October, 1984). Meeting the needs of homeless youth: A report of the Homeless Youth Steering Committee. New York: New York State Council on Children and Families.

⁶ Janus, M.D., McCormack, A., Burgess, A.W., & Hartman, C. (1987). Adolescent Runaways: Causes and Consequences. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

unambiguously conveys what has been done to the child. Further, the latter word better parallels the term "runaway" and its derivation, as in the clause "a child who has run away or been thrown away."

Although throwaway children are included under the rubric of missing children, they illustrate one of the fundamental shortcomings of this generic term. A "missing" child should literally mean a child whose parents or guardians do not know the child's whereabouts. It presumes that the parents want the child, are looking for the child, and "miss" the child. In the case of throwaways, however, parents may not want the child back, or may have themselves left and abandoned the child. If such parents do not know where their child is, it is out of choice. The child may be just down the block at a friend's house, but the parents have not looked and may not care. This does not seem to be a "missing child" in the same sense as a child for whom parents looked and whom they could not find despite their search.

Nonetheless, throwaways have been included in the concern about "missing children." As we have pointed out in Chapter 1 and elsewhere,⁷ the concern about "missing children" is really about children who are missing or displaced, i.e., not where they are supposed to be, and as a result endangered. Even though it may be mistaken to call them "missing," throwaway children, by virtue of

⁷ Finkelhor, D., Hotaling, G., & Sedlak, A. (1990). National Incidence Study of Missing, Abducted, Runaway and Throwaway Children: Definitions. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

being forced out of their household and the protection of adults, are certainly "displaced," and frequently endangered.

Unfortunately, although they are an important group of children, throwaways have not typically been distinguished from runaways in prior incidence studies. The several studies of youth at runaway shelters and on the street that have attempted to identify throwaways as a separate group reported widely discrepant findings of the proportion that could be classified as throwaways. Some found the proportion to be under 10 percent;^{8,9} others put it at about one-third;^{10,11} still others, including studies that focused on adjudicated runaway youth, said it was closer to about one-half.^{12,13,14} The results of one study¹⁵ suggested that the figure may differ considerably for runaways who returned home (17%) and those who did not (39%).

⁸ Butler, D. (1974). Runaway House: A Youth-run Project. Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office.

⁹ Felsman, J.K. (1984). Abandoned Children: A reconsideration. Children Today, 13-18.

¹⁰ Opinion Research Corporation, op. cit.

¹¹ Powers, J.L., Jaklitsch, B., & Eckenrode, J. (April, 1988). Behavioral indicators of maltreatment among runaway and homeless youth. Paper presented at the National Symposium on Child Victimization, Anaheim, CA.

¹² Rothman, J., with David, T. (1985). Status offenders in Los Angeles County: Focus on runaway and homeless youth. A study and policy recommendations. Bush Program in Child and Family Policy, School of Social Welfare, University of California, Los Angeles, in collaboration with Department of Children's Services, Los Angeles County, Los Angeles, CA.

¹³ Adams, G.R., Gulotta, T., & Clancy, M.A. (1985). Homeless adolescents: A descriptive study of similarities and differences between runaways and throwaways. Adolescence, 79, 715-724.

¹⁴ Levine, R.S., Metzendorf, D., & Van Boskirk, K.A. (1986). Runaway and throwaway youth: A case for early intervention with truants. Social Work in Education, 8, 93-106.

¹⁵ Opinion Research Corporation, op. cit.

Defining Throwaways

The biggest problem in past research on throwaways has been the almost complete absence of clear definitional criteria. The distinction between runaways and throwaways has been vague and variable,¹⁶ which partly accounts for the absence of a reliable count.

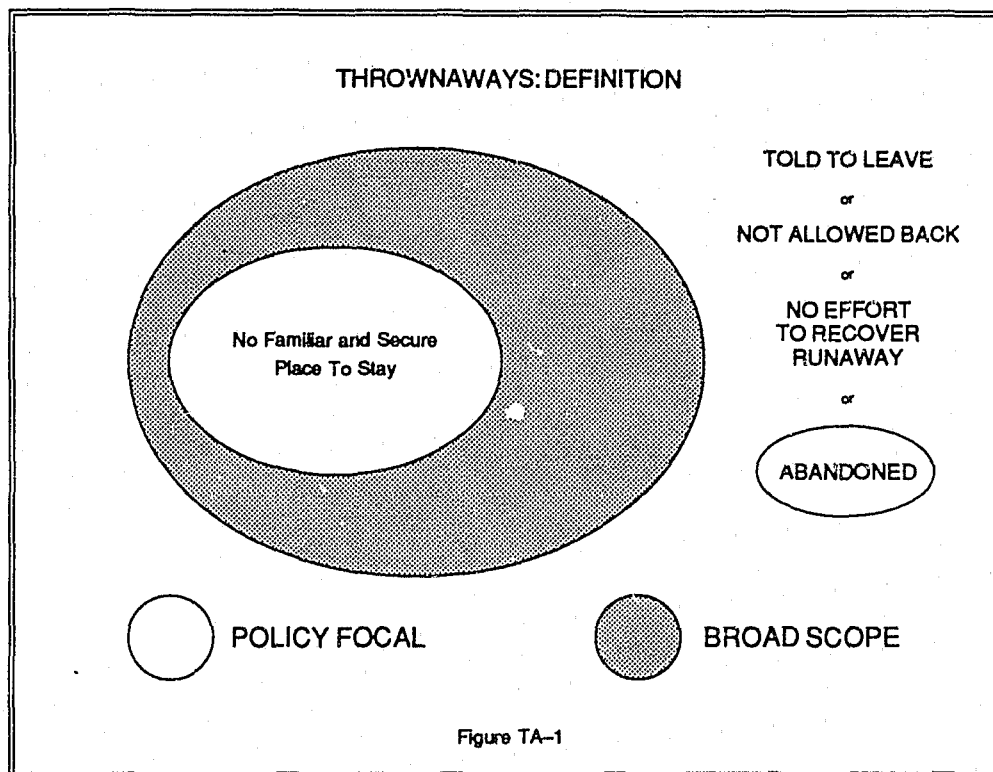
In this study, we delineated four situations that could classify a child as a Throwaway. Included were:

- 1) Children who were directly told to leave the household;
- 2) Children who were abandoned or deserted;
- 3) Children who were away from home, for whatever reason, and wanted to come home, but a parent or other adult household member refused to permit them to return; and
- 4) Children who ran away and whose parent(s) or caretaker(s) made no effort to recover them or did not care whether or not they returned.

Before discussing these categories, a few general points about our classification of Throwaways should be mentioned.

To be classified as a Throwaway, the child had to be out of the household at least overnight. As with Runaways, Throwaways were classified as either Broad Scope or Policy Focal depending on whether the child was without a familiar and secure place to stay while away (Figure TA-1).

¹⁶ For example, it has ranged from more limited conceptions, where only those children who were told to leave or who were abandoned by their parents were included, to broader conceptions where any runaway who had been mistreated or who felt emotionally rejected was included.



It is also important to understand the variety of children we did not count as Throwaways. A child locked out of the household for a few hours was not counted. Nor were children whose parents wanted them out but took steps to insure adequate adult supervision. For instance, children who were sent to military schools, or facilities for emotionally disturbed children, or chemical dependency clinics may well have left the household against their will, but we did not include them as Throwaways.

We only counted children for whom the parent or caretaker failed to provide for adequate substitute care. So, for example, the child who was told to leave the household was not considered a Throwaway if the parent arranged for adequate alternative care at a relative's or friend's house.

We made no attempt to evaluate the caretakers' reasons for throwing the child away. Certainly there were cases in our Throwaway count where children had become unruly or difficult to live with. But if the caretaker told the child to leave or refused the child permission to return, and did not provide adequate substitute care, then this was considered a Throwaway. By the same token, we did not take into account any information obtained from the child in classifying a case as a Throwaway since we did not have this input. Ideally, such information might be very helpful in correctly classifying cases.

It is important to keep in mind that whether a parent or caretaker provided for adequate care is a separate issue from whether the child in fact ended up in a supervised setting. Thus, given two children who were thrown out of their homes, neither with adequate arrangements for their care, the one who ended up roaming the streets was classified as a Policy Focal Throwaway while the one who was able to make his or her own arrangements to stay at a friend's house was a Broad Scope Throwaway. Both qualified as Throwaways because in neither instance did the parent do anything about the child's supervision, but one child ended up in a safe environment (and so was Broad Scope only), while the other did not (and so qualified as Policy Focal).

A second Throwaway category consisted of children who were abandoned or otherwise deserted. Long a child welfare concern, these children have generally not been thought of as throwaways, a concept traditionally reserved for teenagers. Abandoned children are typically younger, and their parents leave them rather than

ejecting them from the home. However, they should also be regarded as a type of Throwaway because they meet the lack of care and supervision criterion.

Certainly not all situations commonly thought of as abandonment or desertion were included in our definition. We limited our scope to those cases of abandonment in which the parent left permanently or for an indefinitely long period, and failed to make any provision for someone to assume the custody of the child to ensure the child's adequate care and supervision. Not included in this Throwaway category were cases where a parent returned and assumed custody of a child and cases where adequate alternative care was arranged. Also excluded were cases of abandonment that came about because of unforeseeable and involuntary conditions, such as the parent or caretaker suffering an incapacitating medical or mental condition, or imprisonment.

The third category comprised children who had been away for any reason, and their caretakers refused to permit them to return home. This included cases where a parent locked a child out of the house for at least overnight and did not arrange adequate, alternative care. The child may have run away but this was irrelevant to whether the case qualified as a Throwaway, since the critical feature was the parent's or caretaker's overt refusal to admit the child.

In designing the last category, we confronted the thorny issue of distinguishing Runaways from Throwaways. This category included any child who ran away or left and the parent made no effort to recover the child or stated that she/he did not care

whether the child stayed away or returned. In our estimation, either of these circumstances indicated enough abdication of parental responsibility to constitute throwing away behavior. The child may have been thrown away by default--because of the parent's inaction--but he or she was no less a Throwaway child by this account.

Counting children in this last group as Throwaways (rather than simply or solely as Runaways) expands the concept beyond its traditional usage. However, our definition of this category still represents a relatively narrow concept of a Throwaway because it gives the benefit of the doubt to the parent. In the Household Survey, all a caretaker had to do was to claim that she or he cared about whether a Runaway returned and had taken some measures to try to recover the child and we did not count the child as a Throwaway. Likewise, parents could have badly abused a child before the child left, and yet, if they tried to recover the child (such as by calling the police or by searching) and said they wanted the child back, then we did not count the child as a Throwaway. This approach biased the interpretation of events in the parents' favor.

Brief Review of Data Sources

There were two main sources of information on the incidence of Throwaways: the Household Survey and the Community Professionals Study.

Household Survey. The key estimate of the incidence of Throwaways comes from the household telephone survey of 10,544

caretakers concerning experiences of 20,505 children.¹⁷ The caretakers were asked a variety of screening questions to uncover potential Throwaway episodes. Such episodes could have been revealed in a direct or indirect mode.

In the direct mode, two screening questions asked about possible throwaway episodes:

- 1) "In the last year did you or any adult in your household force or tell [any of these children] to leave home or decide not to allow them back in the home?"
- 2) "In the last year was there any time when having [any of these children] in your home became a lot of trouble and they left?"

Potential Throwaway episodes could have also been identified in the indirect mode, through the Runaway screener questions.

- 1) "In the last year did [any of these children] leave home without permission and stay away for at least a few hours?"
- 2) "Did [any of these children] choose not to come home from somewhere when they were supposed to and stay away for at least two nights?"
- 3) "Was there any time when you were concerned because you couldn't find [any of these children] or they didn't come home?"

If answers to the Runaway followup questions revealed that the caretaker (or some other household adult) had kicked the child out,

¹⁷ The Throwaway screener questions were actually only asked in households which had a child age 7 or older. However, Throwaway episodes could also come to the study's attention through other questions that were asked of every household with children, so potentially any child could have qualified.

or that the caretaker did not want the child back or had not tried to find the child, then the episode was classified as a Throwaway.¹⁸

One other screener identified possible Throwaway children who had been ejected from the respondent household. Caretakers were asked:

Other than anything you have already told me about, has there been a time, either currently or during the past 12 months, when you did not know where [any of these children] were living?

This question was intended to probe for children who would ordinarily be cared for by the respondent, but who might have been abandoned or for whom the respondent no longer assumed responsibility. If followup questioning revealed that the respondent had made no effort to find this child, or did not care whether the child returned, or had abandoned the child without adequate substitute care, then the child was considered a Throwaway.

This strategy for identifying and counting Throwaway children had several clear strengths.

First, the Household Survey allowed enumeration of many episodes that would have likely been missed by other methodologies. Most Throwaway episodes are known only to the parents and

¹⁸ The same child might also qualify as a Runaway--meaning that some children were countable as both Runaways and Throwaways.

children. These events are rarely reported to police, for obvious reasons, and only relatively long-term episodes ever become known to social service agencies or runaway shelters. An entirely agency-based approach to collecting data about the throwaway problem would have uncovered only a select segment of Throwaway children (see the discussion of the Community Professionals Study, below).

A second strength of this approach was that it capitalized on multiple opportunities for identifying such episodes in the course of the interview. Earlier studies have typically relied on a single question to elicit disclosures, but because respondents sometimes differ from the researchers in how they define their situations or in the terminology they use, episodes that might qualify as countable Throwaway events can be missed.

A third strength was that this survey made a concerted effort to ask about Throwaways in ways that would encourage disclosures of possibly embarrassing or stigmatizing situations. For example, a caretaker might not admit to throwing a child out, but might admit that "a child became a lot of trouble and left." Basically, we permitted interviews to proceed on the assumption that such a child was a "runaway," while at the same time including questions that ascertained whether or not the caretaker lacked concern about the child's return.

Despite these strengths, we nevertheless recognized two major drawbacks to this methodology. First, it relied exclusively on

parents' or caretakers' self-reports.¹⁹ The behaviors that identified a Throwaway in this study all reflected negatively on the parent or caretaker, so we expected caretakers to underreport these events to some degree. To minimize this bias as much as possible, we tried to ask questions in a subtle and sensitive way, but social desirability effects were probably present nonetheless. To get an idea of the possible extent of the bias that remained, we explored two sources of validation for the Household Survey Throwaways, which we describe in more detail below.

The second drawback was that the Household Survey questions were not designed to identify those Throwaway children who had literally been abandoned. We compensated for this by using a separate data source for these children.

Community Professionals Study. The Throwaways who were most difficult to identify through interviews with caretakers were abandoned children, whose parents or caretakers had gone off and left them (rather than kicking them out). We expected that caretakers would simply deny that such children were a part of their household, so the Household Survey was not designed to identify these children.

Instead, our strategy for counting abandoned children relied on a survey of professionals in agencies likely to come into contact with such children in a nationally representative sample of 29 counties. This study took advantage of the fact that abandonment is officially recognized as a form of child neglect,

¹⁹ The Juvenile Facilities Study did not include any questions about throwaways.

as are many other types of throwing away behaviors, and it capitalized on the availability of recent national data about these children: the second National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect.²⁰ We took all potential Throwaway cases submitted to this child abuse study and reevaluated them to determine which ones met NISMART standards. Because the child abuse study had used a nationally representative sample of professionals and agencies, it was possible to generate national estimates based on the reevaluated cases.

Nonetheless, there are two reasons why the estimates of abandoned children derived from the Community Professionals Study may undercount their true incidence. First and foremost, the count was limited to cases coming to the attention of professionals in community agencies. There are surely some abandoned children, and perhaps many of the other types of Throwaway children, who do not come to the attention of such agencies.²¹ Second, the Community Professionals Study only counted cases that qualified as a type of child neglect. Although all Throwaway children should have been included by the design of that study, it is possible for some cases to have been missed because participants failed to label them as "neglect." For example, a participant might have regarded a situation where parents took a "tough love" approach²² to a child's curfew violations or drug abuse as "therapeutic," rather than as

²⁰ Sedlak, A.J. (1988). Study findings: Study of national incidence and prevalence of child abuse and neglect: 1988. Washington, DC: Department of Health and Human Services.

²¹ Or, who come to the attention of agencies other than the kinds that were included in this Community Professionals Study.

²² Cf. U.S. News and World Report, op. cit.

neglectful, and for this reason may have excluded it from the study. Despite these shortcomings, the analysis of the Community Professional Study provided information about the category of Throwaway children not directly assessed with other methods--those very young children who were abandoned or deserted by their parents/guardians.

The Incidence Estimates

Our best estimate of the number of children who were Broad Scope Throwaways during 1988 is 127,100. As shown in Table TA-1, this is a combination of the estimates of two non-overlapping groups: 112,600 Broad Scope children who were throwaway from households in our Household Survey and an additional 14,500 Broad Scope abandoned children, who were identified through the Community Professionals Survey.

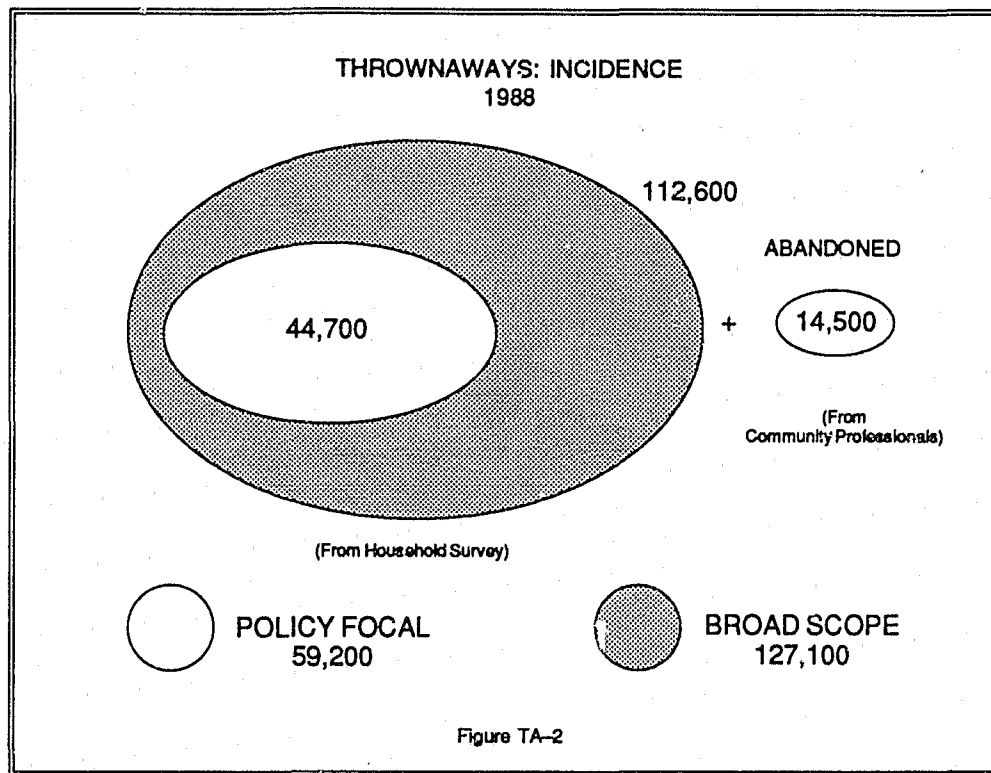
Table TA-1. Estimated National Incidence of Throwaways, 1988

	Number of Children	Rate per 1,000 Children 0-17
<hr/>		
<u>Household Survey (HS)</u>		
Broad Scope ^a	112,600	1.79
Policy Focal	44,700	0.71
<u>Community Professional Study (CPS)</u>		
Abandonment	14,500	0.23
<u>HS & CPS Combined</u>		
Total Broad Scope ^a	127,100	2.02
Total Policy Focal	59,200	0.94

^a Includes Policy Focal

We also estimated that 59,200 children qualified as Policy Focal Throwaways; all 14,500 of the children who were abandoned combined with an estimated 44,700²³ of those identified in the Household Survey who were without a familiar and secure place to stay at some point during their Throwaway experiences (Figure TA-2).

²³ The estimate of Policy Focal Throwaways from the Household Survey has a large confidence interval. See report on Household Survey Methodology.



It is also of considerable interest to estimate Throwaways as a proportion of the group that in past research has been treated simply as Runaways. This would be the pooled group of Runaways and Throwaways in the Household Survey, an estimated 513,400 children (table TA-2). This total is not simply a sum of our separate estimates of Runaways and Throwaways, because an estimated 45,900 children qualified as both Runaways and Throwaways.²⁴ We estimate that the Household Survey Throwaways constituted about 22 percent of this pooled group of Runaways and Throwaways, which is lower

²⁴ For example, a child could have run away at one point in the year and been thrown away at a second point. Or an episode that began as a Runaway, later became a Throwaway when the caretaker refused to allow the child to return. Children who were classified as both Runaways and Throwaways appear in the tabulations in both chapters. This overlap is another reason why estimates for separate categories in this study cannot simply be added together.

than estimates made by most previous studies. It is, however, about the same percentage of throwaways in the pooled group of returned runaways and throwaways in the 1975 Opinion Research study.²⁵

Table TA-2. Cross-Classification of Broad Scope Runaways and Throwaways From Households Only

	Number of Children
Runaways only	400,800
Throwaways only	66,700
Both	45,900
Total Pooled Runaways and Throwaways	513,400

In evaluating these estimates of Throwaways, several cautions should be borne in mind. First, the number of abandoned Throwaway children was based only on cases known to professionals, and so is probably an underestimate. It reflects only a select subset of these children who came to the attention of a professional who (a) worked in a circumscribed set of community agencies, (b) regarded the situation as neglectful, and (c) took the trouble of submitting the case to the study.

Second, the estimate of Household Survey Throwaways was based on caretakers' reports--often of their own actions--and so is likely to also understate the numbers of children who actually

²⁵ Opinion Research Corporation, op. cit. Reported to be 17 percent. This and all subsequent comparisons to the ORC study must be taken with caution because of the definitional differences between the two studies highlighted in Chapter 5.

qualified for this group. Caretakers may have been reluctant to admit that they kicked a child out or that they did not care if a child came back or not. To assess this bias, we explored two sources of validation for the Household Survey Thrownaway estimates.

One validation check was built into the Household Survey itself. When a household had children who were known to have also lived elsewhere during the preceding year, caretakers were asked whether these children had come to stay with them as a result of having been thrown away from another household. Thus, we identified Thrownaway children who had found refuge in our surveyed households. This allowed us to compare estimates based on caretakers' reports of **throwing children out** with estimates of the numbers of children who were **taken in** by surveyed households. Using this information, we estimated that approximately 58,600 children nationwide were taken in by other households after they had been forced or told to leave their original homes. Note that this estimate does not include an important category of Thrownaways--those children who were not overtly expelled but who ran away and whose caretakers made no efforts to find them or did not care whether they returned. The proper comparison with this estimate is that portion of the 112,600 Household Survey Thrownaways who were explicitly thrown or locked out of their homes. This number is 56,100. The two numbers--the 56,100 estimated from households that threw children away and the 58,600 estimated from households that took in Thrownaway children--are

remarkably similar, a finding that indicates a fair degree of candor on the part of the caretakers who did the throwing away.²⁶

A second source of validation information came from the Returned Runaway Study. In the Returned Runaway Study, we had classified 14 of the 85 children as Throwaways based on their caretakers' accounts (Table TA-3). However, based on the children's own accounts, there would have been 20 countable Throwaways in the group. Because this study included children who had been selected from the main household survey sample at greatly different rates, we cannot readily say exactly how much higher our incidence estimates would have been if we had based them on direct interviews with the children themselves. However, we can say that, had we used a child-interview approach, our estimates of the incidence of Throwaways probably would have been 40 percent or more higher than those reported here.

²⁶ But the comparability of the two estimates here does not necessarily indicate complete candor on the part of the throwing-away caretakers. This is because the estimate based on children who were taken in may also understate the problem, since it reflects only that subset of Throwaways who happened to find another household willing to shelter them and whose new caretaker knew enough about their Throwaway experiences to describe them and was willing to do so for this study.

Table TA-3. Changes to Classification of Children if Child's Rather Than
Caretaker's Account Had Been Used--Returned Runaway Study

Number of Countable Throwaways Based on Caretakers' Accounts	14
Children <u>Not</u> Counted Using Caretaker's Account Who <u>Would</u> Have Been Using Child's Account	+12
Children <u>Counted</u> Using Caretaker's Account Who <u>Would Not</u> Have Been Using Child's Account	- 6
Net Change Had We Interviewed Only the Children	+ 6

It must be remembered that a Runaway episode qualified as a Throwaway when a caretaker said that he or she did not care whether the child returned or had made no effort to recover the child. The "lack of caring" criterion is the most subjective element in the various NISMART definitions, so it is not surprising to encounter considerable disagreement between children and caretakers on this point. However, it is important to note that the caretaker-child disagreements were not simply a matter of children reporting an event while caretakers denied that anything happened; they were disagreements about the more subjective elements of the experience. As a result, although there was an overall gain of six countable cases by the children's accounts, there was also a considerable degree of reclassification--involving a total of 18 children (Table TA-3). Thus, had we based our findings on interviews with the children themselves, we would not only have generated higher estimates of Throwaways, but we would have also identified a different set of children and episodes which

could well have had a substantive effect on our conclusions about the characteristics of the children and their experiences.

To summarize, our assessment of the validity of the Throwaway estimates differs for each of the three subgroups discussed above. The Abandonment portion was probably underestimated because it relied solely on information provided by participating professionals. The Runaways who counted as Throwaways because their caretakers did not care or had made no effort to recover them were also probably underestimated, because the children reported more such rejection than caretakers admitted. Finally, our validation check indicated that we probably maximized accuracy for the estimates of children who were actually kicked or locked out of their homes.

The Demographics of Throwaways

As described earlier, the Broad Scope Throwaway estimate combined information from two sources--the abandoned children identified in the Community Professionals Study and Throwaways from the Household Survey. Because the information available from these two sources was not always comparable, we will report separately the demographic characteristics for each group. However, readers should bear in mind that, in the total picture, the Household Survey Throwaways predominate, comprising 87 percent of the Broad Scope total.

Household Survey Throwaways. The very oldest children, those 16- and 17-years-old, constituted the great majority (84%) of these Throwaways (Table TA-4). There were also about as many boys as girls: the estimates (47% and 53%, respectively) were not statistically distinguishable.

Table TA-4. Age and Sex of Broad Scope Throwaways: Household Survey

	Throwaway % (Unweighted N = 46) (Weighted N = 112,600)	U.S. Pop %
<u>Age</u>		
0 - 12	0% ^a	69%
13 ^b - 15	16% ^a	15%
16 ^b - 17	84%	16%
<u>Gender</u>		
Boys	47%	51%
Girls	53%	49%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

^b Some children who were this age at the time of interview were a year younger at the time of episode.

Two-parent households were underrepresented among the families of Household Survey Throwaways (Table TA-5).²⁷ It is possible that the presence of two natural or adoptive parents serves to protect a child from being thrown away. For one thing, in a two-parent household there is a third party to diffuse or moderate the conflict between one parent and the child. Moreover, when the third party is a natural or adoptive parent, she or he not only has

²⁷ See Chapter 3, Footnote #29.

a clear emotional investment in the child but is also in a legitimate position to say how the child should be treated and can effectively oppose attempts to kick the child out. For another thing, in families broken by divorce, children may sometimes be thrown out because they are identified with the absent parent or embroiled in the parental conflict, or because single parents lack the resources to effectively control their child's behavior alone.

Table TA-5. Family Structure of Households of Broad Scope Throwaways:
Household Survey

	Throwaway % (Unweighted N = 46) (Weighted N = 112,600)	U.S. Population %
Both parents	19%*	67%
Single parent, no partner	29%	16%
Single parent, w/partner	15% ^a	7%
Neither parent	12% ^a	3%
Unknown	24% ^a	8%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

* Differs from population estimate

The racial distribution of the Household Survey Throwaways was not significantly different from that of the general population of children (Table TA-6). The incomes of their households were not notably different from the general population. (Households with Throwaways appeared to be somewhat underrepresented in the second-highest income category, the \$30,000 to \$40,000 range, but this was not statistically significant by our tests here.)

Table TA-6. Race and Household Income of Broad Scope Throwaways:
Household Survey

	Throwaway % (Unweighted N=46) (Weighted N=112,600)	U.S. Population %
Race		
White	61%	71%
Black	24% ^a	15%
Hispanic	11% ^a	11%
Other	3% ^a	3%
Household Income		
< \$10,000	15% ^a	15%
\$10,000 - \$20,000	25%	20%
\$20,000 - \$30,000	17% ^a	25%
\$30,000 - \$40,000	9% ^a	18%
\$40,000+	35%	22%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Households with Throwaway children were also comparable to general population households in their distributions according to geographic region and type of community (see Table TA-7).

Table TA-7. Region and Community Type for Broad Scope Throwaways:
Household Survey

	Throwaway % (Unweighted N=46) (Weighted N=112,600)	U.S. Population %
Region		
Northeast	11% ^a	19%
Midwest	37%	25%
South	24% ^a	35%
West	28%	21%
Community Type		
Large city	32%	18%
Suburb	20% ^a	18%
Large town	18%	18%
Small town	18% ^a	27%
Rural area	13% ^a	19%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Abandoned Throwaways. Throwaway children who were abandoned or left by their caretakers tended to be quite a bit younger than those who were forced out of their homes. As can be seen in Table TA-8, more than 50 percent of the abandoned children were age 4 or younger, while only 1 percent were 15 or older, a pattern that contrasts sharply with that in Table TA-4. Table TA-8 also shows that males and females were equally represented among the abandoned children.

Table TA-8. Age and Sex of Abandoned Children: Community Professionals Study

	Abandonment % (Unweighted N=62) (Weighted N=14,500)	U.S. Pop %
Age		
Less than 1	14%	6%
1 - 4	37%	23%
5 - 10	26%	27%
11 - 14	22% ^a	26%
15 - 17	1% ^{a*}	18%
Gender		
Boys	52%	51%
Girls	48%	49%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

* Differs from population estimate

Children living with both parents were underrepresented among those who were abandoned (Table TA-9). Although this pattern is inherently reasonable, the large number of cases where family structure was unknown oblige us to regard this as a tentative, rather than a firm, conclusion.

Table TA-9. Family Structure of Families with Abandoned Children:
Community Professionals Study

	Abandonment % (Unweighted N=62) (Weighted N=14,500)	U.S. Population ^a %
Both parents	37%*	74%
Mother only	25%	21%
Father only	14% ^b	2.5%
Neither parent	--	2.5%
Unknown	25%	--

^a Taken from U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 418, *Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1986*, U.S. Government Printing Office. Washington, DC, 1986.

^b Based on fewer than 10 cases

* Differs from population estimate

As shown in Table TA-10, white children were also considerably underrepresented (50 percent of the abandoned children, but 81 percent of children in the general population). Unfortunately, race was unknown for a portion (18%) of abandoned children.

Very few abandoned children came from higher-income households (Table TA-10). Again, the high proportion (54%) of abandoned children from households with unknown income levels makes this relationship difficult to evaluate fully. It would appear, though,

that adequate financial resources are an important protection against abandonment.

Table TA-10. Race and Income of Families With Abandonment Episodes:
Community Professionals Study

	Abandonment % (Unweighted N=62) (Weighted N=14,500)	U.S. Population ^a %
Race		
White (incl. Hispanic)	50%*	81%
Non-white	31%	19%
Unknown	18%	--
Income		
< \$15,000	46%	29%
\$15,000 or more	0% ^{b*}	71%
Unknown	54%	--

^a Taken from U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 418, Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1986, U.S. Government Printing Office. Washington, DC, 1986.

^b Based on fewer than 10 cases

* Differs from population estimate

Finally, children in the South were abandoned less often than the general child population estimate for this region would have suggested (Table TA-11). It is not clear why this occurred. Future research might clarify this finding by linking abandonment rates to some factor or combination of factors that differentiate this region from others (such as different cultural norms and sanctions, different stances by the legal and social service

systems, different economic conditions, or even different demographic compositions of the populations of these regions).

Table TA-11. Geographical Region of Children With Abandonment Episodes:
Community Professionals Study

	Abandonment % (Unweighted N=62) (Weighted N=14,500)	U.S. Population ^a %
Northeast	35%	19%
Midwest	11%	25%
South	8% ^{b*}	35%
West	46%	21%

^a Taken from U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-25, No. 1010, State Population and Household Estimates, With Age, Sex, and Components of Change: 1981-1986, U.S. Government Printing Office. Washington, DC, 1987.

^b Based on fewer than 10 cases

* Differs from population estimate

Characteristics of Throwaway Episodes

Details about the Throwaway episodes themselves were available only from the Household Survey, for the subset of children we have been referring to as Household Survey Throwaways who constituted 87 percent of the Broad Scope total.

Somewhat less than half this group (44%) had been directly asked or forced to leave their households (Table TA-12). Eleven percent had been away from their household (not as runaways) and were refused permission to return. In a quarter of the cases, children had run away and caretakers did not care whether the children returned. In 29 percent of cases, caretakers of runaways made no efforts to recover them. Considering that the episodes

involving runaways typically began with the children at home, the information given in Table TA-13 is consistent with this pattern of findings. For the vast majority (84%) of Household Survey Throwaways, their experiences began with the children at home.

Table TA-12. Throwaway Type for Broad Scope Throwaway Episodes

Type	Throwaway % ^a (Unweighted N=46) (Weighted N=112,600)
Asked to leave	44%
Away and refused permission to return	11% ^b
Runaway, and caretaker doesn't care	25% ^b
Runaway, and caretaker made no effort to recover	29%

^a Child could qualify for more than one category, hence this column sums to more than 100%

^b Based on fewer than 10 cases

Table TA-13. Location of Broad Scope Throwaways at Beginning of Episode

Type	Throwaway % (Unweighted N=46) (Weighted N=112,600)
Own home	83%
Another's home	5% ^a
School	1% ^a
Other	10%
DK/NA ^b	1% ^a

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases
^b Don't Know / Not Ascertained

Caretakers who acknowledged that a child had been forced to leave or refused permission to return²⁸ most often named mothers and fathers as the persons responsible (Table TA-14).

²⁸ There were other children who were determined to have also been explicitly forced out or refused permission to return on the basis of information given later in the interview. These children's caretakers were not asked the question about the identity of the person responsible for throwing the child away.

Table TA-14. Who Asked Broad Scope Throwaways To Leave or Refused To Readmit Them to the Household

	Throwaway ‡ (Unweighted N=46) (Weighted N=112,600)
Father	10% ^a
Mother	13% ^a
Stepmother	2% ^a
Other	6% ^a
NA ^b	69%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

^b The answer was Not Ascertained; often because child was a type of Throwaway that did not involve being asked to leave or refused readmittance

Broad Scope Throwaway episodes tended to begin in spring and summer (61% between April and August), or in November, right before the holiday season. In contrast, only 14 percent began in the winter months, between December and March (Table TA-15). Episodes began during weekends and weekdays roughly in proportion to the portion of the week these periods represent. Nearly two-thirds of the Throwaway situations began during the afternoon or evening hours.

Table TA-15. Month, Time, and Day When Broad Scope Thrownaway Episodes Began

	Thrownaway %
	(Unweighted N=46) (Weighted N=112,600)
<hr/>	
Month	
January	3% ^a
February	6% ^a
March	3% ^a
April	15% ^a
May	12% ^a
June	15% ^a
July	6% ^a
August	13% ^a
September	4% ^a
October	9% ^a
November	15% ^a
December	2% ^a
Day	
Weekday	50%
Weekend	8% ^a
DK/NA	42%
Time of Day	
Morning	21% ^a
Afternoon	30%
Evening	34%
Night	12% ^a
DK/NA	3% ^a

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Most Throwaway situations (59%) were preceded by an argument of some kind (Table TA-16). These arguments generally concerned what seem to be fairly common subjects of parent-teenager conflict: house rules (49% of the Throwaways' experiences), friends (36%), staying out late (27%), school (23%), and dress/appearance (12%). More "loaded" topics, such as drugs, sex, alcohol, and criminal behavior, were in contention somewhat less frequently than one might have expected.

Table TA-16. Argument Prior to Episode for Broad Scope Throwaways

	Throwaway % ^a (Unweighted N=46) (Weighted N=112,600)
Any argument	59%
About:	
House rules	49%
Friends	36%
Staying out late	27%
School	23%
Drugs	13% ^b
Dress/Appearance	12% ^b
Sex	8% ^b
Alcohol	6% ^b
Criminal behavior	4% ^b
Other	14% ^b
Physical violence ^c	27%

^a Child could qualify for more than one category, hence this column sums to more than 100%

^b Based on fewer than 10 cases

^c By anyone involved in the argument

At the same time, a considerable minority of Throwaways (27%) had episodes that were preceded by arguments that involved violence--hitting, slapping, punching, spanking, or hitting with an object. This is a dramatic testimony to the intensity of the conflict that presumably precipitated the episodes. Again, observe that this was more than double the prevalence of violence reported for Runaways (where only 11% of the children had episodes that were preceded by violent arguments). This finding strongly parallels that of the 1975 Opinion Research Corporation Study,²⁹ in which 31 percent of the throwaway instances, but only 13 percent of the nonthrowaway cases, involved physical abuse against the youth.

When Throwaway children first left or were first denied access to their homes, their caretakers believed that most (60%) initially went to stay with a friend (Table TA-17). Only a minority stayed with other relatives (18%), or made other arrangements (7%). During their entire time away, a fairly large proportion of the children (88%) stayed for some period at a friend's house, and about one-fourth (26%) spent some time at a relative's house. Four percent of these children stayed in a runaway shelter³⁰ and 13 percent were known to have been without any place to sleep at some point during their absence from home. Staying at a friend's or relative's house did not automatically disqualify a child from being classified as a Policy Focal Throwaway. There were instances where we judged that a friend or relative's house failed to provide a familiar and secure place, as

²⁹ Opinion Research Corporation, op cit.

³⁰ We think many children may not have discussed these events with parents.

when there was no adult supervision, or when the adult supervision was so poor that it failed to prevent illegal activities (such as drug dealing) in these households. Altogether, we reported earlier that 44,700 (or 40%) of the total Broad Scope Throwaways from the Household Survey qualified as Policy Focal, meaning that they had been without a familiar and secure place to stay at some point during their Throwaway experiences.

Table TA-17. Destinations of Broad Scope Throwaways

	Throwaway % ^a (Unweighted N=46) (Weighted N=112,600)
<hr/>	
Initial destination	
Friend's house	60%
Relative's house	18%
Other	7% ^b
DK	15% ^b
At any time at	
Friend's house	88%
Relative's house	26%
Runaway shelter	4% ^b
Any time without place to sleep	
Yes	13% ^b
No	84%
DK	4% ^b
Child accompanied by others	82%

^a Child could qualify for more than one category, hence this column sums to more than 100%.

^b Based on fewer than 10 cases

The relative seriousness of many of the episodes is evident in Table TA-18: one-fifth of Broad Scope Throwaway children were still absent from home at the time of the interview.³¹ This proportion is twice that found for Runaways (Table RA-10). It is consistent with the finding reported more than a decade ago that nonthrowaway youth are far more likely than Throwaways to return home on their own.³² Nevertheless, the majority (68%) of Throwaway children did return to their home within 2 weeks, so in general these expulsions were not permanent or irreversible.

Table TA-18. Length of Absence of Children in Broad Scope Throwaway Episodes

Absence	Throwaway % ^a (Unweighted N=46) (Weighted N=112,600)
1 day or less	21% ^a
2 - 6 days	22%
1 week, but less than 2 weeks	20% ^a
2 weeks, but less than 4 weeks	6% ^a
4 weeks or more	6% ^a
Not yet returned	20%
NA	5% ^a

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

³¹ If an episode lasted more than a year, it is likely that we would not have heard about it, since we asked only about episodes that began in the last year. So Table TA-18 may slightly undercount really long-term episodes.

³² Opinion Research Corporation, op. cit.

Most Throwaway children stayed fairly close to home (Table TA-19). Only 7 percent traveled distances greater than 50 miles, while the large majority (64%) stayed within a 10-mile radius. This pattern is consistent with that found for Runaways in this study, and it confirms previous research as well.^{33,34}

Table TA-19. Distance Traveled From Home by Broad Scope Throwaways

Throwaway § ^a (Unweighted N=46) (Weighted N=112,600)	
Less than 1 mile	6% ^a
1 - 9 miles	55%
10 - 49 miles	30%
50 - 99 miles	5% ^a
100+ miles	1% ^a
Out of State	1%
NA	4% ^a

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

The particular anomaly of referring to Throwaways as "missing" children is underscored by the findings in Table TA-20. Caretakers of most Throwaways (60%) claimed to know where the children were most of the time. For only 13 percent of the children, the caretakers did not know their whereabouts at all. Paradoxically, caretakers of Throwaways claimed to know more about the children's whereabouts than did the caretakers of Runaways.

³³ The Runaway and Homeless Youth Advocacy Project. (June, 1982). A Review of the Status of Post Foster Care Youth. Unpublished Manuscript Report, New York Coalition for Juvenile Justice and Youth Services.

³⁴ Opinion Research Corporation, op. cit.

However, one must be somewhat skeptical about these claims. Caretakers who said they did not care and had not actively sought their children may have tried to assuage their guilt (or reduce their culpability in the interviewer's eyes) by claiming that they knew where the children were.

Table TA-20. Knowledge of Whereabouts of Broad Scope Throwaways

	Throwaway ‡ (Unweighted N=46) (Weighted N=112,600)
<hr/>	
Whereabouts known	
Most of the time	60%
More than half the time	13% ^a
Less than half the time	11% ^a
Not at all	13% ^a
NA	4% ^a

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Respondents reported that police had been called in connection with 23 percent of the Broad Scope Throwaways (Table TA-21).³⁵ They also indicated that 15 percent of these children had been picked up by police during the episode and placed in a juvenile detention center (no information was available on this point for nearly 4 percent of the children). None of the Throwaway children in our study sample had been placed in a jail, which led us to conclude that this would have occurred to less than 1 percent of the Throwaways nationwide. Again, for nearly 4 percent of the

³⁵ No information is available about police contact in the cases of abandonment from the Community Professionals Study.

children, respondents did not know whether or not this had occurred.

Table TA-21. Police and Criminal Justice Contact About Broad Scope Throwaways

	Throwaway % (Unweighted N=46) (Weighted N=112,600)
Police contacted	23% ^a
Child in juvenile detention center	15% ^a
Child in jail	<1% ^a

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

As we did in the case of other categories, we also asked respondents to assess whether the Throwaway children had been harmed during the episode. Very few of the children were reported to have suffered any type of harm in connection with the episode (Table TA-22); only 1 percent were said to have been abused or physically assaulted, while 11 percent were thought to have incurred some degree of mental harm (however the respondent construed the meaning of this term). Nevertheless, since many of these respondents had manifested a lack of concern for these children in the first place, they may well have understated the children's experiences of harm and their assessments should be interpreted with considerable skepticism. Information about harm was not available for between 5 and 9 percent of the children, depending on the question.

Table TA-22. Abuse or Harm to Broad Scope Throwaways

	Throwaway %
(Unweighted N=46) (Weighted N=112,600)	
<hr/>	
Sexually Abused	
Yes	<1% ^a
No	95%
DK	5% ^a
Physically Assaulted/Abused	
Yes	1% ^a
No	90%
DK	9% ^a
Physically Harmed	
Yes	<1% ^a
No	95%
DK	5% ^a
Mentally Harmed	
Serious	1% ^a
Mild	7% ^a
Minor	3% ^a
None	83%
DK whether or degree	6% ^a

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Conclusion

We have found the problem of Throwaway children to be a fairly sizable one, annually involving 129,700 children nationwide. Moreover, Throwaways constituted 22 percent of the group that in the past had been treated as runaways.

The majority of these children were forced out of their homes

(rather than abandoned by caretakers who left them), and although they shared some characteristics with Runaways, they tended to be slightly older and their experiences differed in a number of respects. Their episodes were more often preceded by an overt argument of some type (59 percent of Throwaways vs. 36 percent of Runaways), and they were more than twice as likely to have had violence precede their departure (27 percent of Throwaways vs. 11 percent of Runaways). Moreover, the Throwaways were twice as likely to be still absent from their homes at the time their caretakers were interviewed (20 percent of Throwaways vs. 10 percent of Runaways).

These findings underscore the importance of treating these children as a separate group in their own right.³⁶ In comparison to the problems of Runaway children who have not been thrown away, the problems of Throwaways originate from different sources, are subject to different dynamics, and clearly call for very different solutions. Serious damage could result from failing to recognize this. Simplistic approaches that focus on these children's absence from home as the principal problem can only lead to returning them to hostile, and even dangerous, home environments. Bringing these children back to where they "are supposed to be" without additional intervention can only exacerbate their difficulties; at best, it invites a new rejection and their return to the status of Throwaways. A far more indepth approach is needed, one that

³⁶ The differences between the abandoned children and the Throwaways from the Household Survey (in terms of age, race, and income distribution) were also notable. Consideration should be given in the future to treating the abandoned children as an additional separate group.

assesses their home situations and formulates realistic interventions, either to improve their relationship with their caretakers or to place them more permanently elsewhere.

The findings also underscore the anomaly of using the term "missing" to refer to Throwaways, as has been the convention in the past. As noted in earlier sections, the term "missing" presumes at least a benign interest on the part of the parents in locating children whose whereabouts are unknown. This presumption is doubly wrong when applied to Throwaways. First, far more of these children's caretakers claimed to know their whereabouts than for any of the other groups studied in NISMART. Caretakers said they knew the whereabouts of nearly three-fourths of these children more than half the time they were gone (this was true for only half of the Runaways). Second, by definition, the caretakers of these children lacked a benign interest in their welfare or whereabouts. They had overtly expelled nearly half the children, and more than half the children had run away from caretakers who had not attempted to locate them or who expressed no interest in having them return.

In light of their relative lack of concern about these children, it is interesting that caretakers report that police had been contacted concerning nearly one-fourth of the children. Perhaps these represent situations where caretakers had some misgivings after a child was expelled from the home, or perhaps (as some officers have pointed out to us) many of these caretakers called police simply to absolve themselves of responsibility for the child should he or she encounter serious trouble. In any

event, from the perspective of law enforcement receiving such a call, there may not be any detectable difference between a bona fide runaway and a child who has been thrown away. Certainly, all such children qualify under the juvenile statutes as persons in need of supervision. Yet the discussion above also indicates the importance of differentiating Runaways from Throwaways, once a child has been located and before he or she is returned home. Law enforcement officers play a pivotal role in this connection, with important consequences for resolving or worsening the child's situation. There is a clear need to develop methods for early detection of a child's actual status.

Given the size and importance of this group of children, public policy initiatives should begin in at least three arenas. First, the legal status of these children is often ambiguous, with resulting confusion about which community agencies should be responsible for them. Legislation is needed to clarify whether they should be regarded as status offenders and referred to the juvenile justice authorities or as dependent children who are the province of the child welfare system. Second, there is a clear need for programs and services geared specifically to providing the children with secure and supervised care and to working with them and their families both in the present crisis and on a more long-term basis. Third, there needs to be a well-defined interface between law enforcement and these programs and services, so that police officers will be clear about how to respond to the Runaways and Throwaways they encounter.

Finally, we uncovered notable differences in the perspectives of children and their caretakers concerning a central criterion defining Throwaways: whether the caretaker wanted the child to return. Clearly, this is a very subjective element in the situation, and it may not be possible to know exactly where the truth lies. At the same time, this finding has at least two important implications for future work on the problem. First, it suggests the utility of trying in future research to devise a somewhat less subjective way of measuring this aspect of the Runaway/Throwaway boundary. For example, rather than relying on caretakers' reports of what they wanted or on children's interpretations of what their caretakers wanted, perhaps a list of specific caretaker behaviors could be devised that would serve as observable markers or indicators of whether or not the caretaker wanted the child to return. This suggestion assumes that there might be more agreement between caretakers and children about what was explicitly said and done than there is about what caretakers "wanted," an assumption that is empirically testable. Second, the high degree of caretaker-child disagreement emphasizes the importance of including the child's perspective in attempts to understand the problem. Interviews with children will not simply provide results that duplicate with those we uncovered here. Rather, they can contribute to our understanding of throwaway dynamics by giving a very different perspective on this problem.

THROWNAWAYS SUMMARY SHEET

Incidence

- 59,200 Policy Focal children
- 127,100 Broad Scope children

Summary of Findings about Broad Scope Throwaways

Profile groups

- Children 16 years and older (Household Survey data)
- 4 years or under (abandoned children)
- Children from families without two natural or adoptive parents

Demographics

- Low-income households
- Northeast and West
- Abandonment lower for whites

Circumstances

- (Household Survey data only)
- Nearly half were directly forced to leave
- More than half were Runaways with unconcerned caretakers
- Most began in spring and summer and November
- Most were preceded by an argument of some type
- Substantial minority (27%) were preceded by violent arguments
- Majority stayed with friends while away; 4 percent stayed in runaway shelters; 13 percent were without a place to sleep

Duration

- Majority (68%) returned home within 2 weeks
- 20 percent not yet returned

Distance

- Majority (64%) stayed within 10-mile radius of home

Missing

- Caretakers knew whereabouts of more than half most of the time

Police Contact

- 23 percent of children

Harm

- Only 1 percent abused or physically assaulted
- 11 percent experienced some degree of mental harm

Chapter 7

LOST, INJURED, OR OTHERWISE MISSING CHILDREN

Lost children are perhaps the most quintessentially "missing" children, as tales like Hansel and Gretel, the Wizard of Oz, and Peter Pan remind us. And the storybook endings notwithstanding, real lost children do come to harm, even if not at the hands of witches and pirates.

Other tales such as the ancient Greek myth of Icarus remind us that children can also become "missing" through accidents and injuries in the course of activities as diverse as bicycling, camping, and even flying. Because the harm has already and not just potentially occurred, many of these should be considered very serious episodes.

Finally, children can be perceived as missing for a variety of other reasons not included in any of the categories discussed here and in earlier chapters. For example, they can forget what time it is, they can miscommunicate with parents about when they will be home and, due to unforeseen events, they can be trapped or delayed in places from which they cannot call and where they are not readily found. Such episodes result in more than a few frantic appeals to police.

Yet such lost, injured, or otherwise missing children have been virtually ignored in the mobilization around the problem of "missing children." The Missing Children's legislation and the books, pamphlets, and articles about missing children rarely

mention such children, choosing to concentrate on abducted, runaway, and exploited children.

This unfortunate omission has occurred primarily because the missing children problem has been seen primarily in the context of crime and law enforcement. Abducted children--obvious victims of crimes--were the first to be targeted. Then runaways were added, with the rationale that these were children at high risk of becoming crime victims or criminals. But lost, injured, or other missing children are not thought of in connection with crime, and thus have received little attention.

Nonetheless, lost, injured, or otherwise missing children are a component in the "missing child" problem and should not be ignored. Obviously, in times of mass immigration, natural disaster, war, and social dislocation, the problem of children losing contact with their families becomes much more serious. But even under current relatively stable social conditions, many such incidents occur. Children are lost in busy airports, shopping malls, and city streets, sometimes for extended periods. Children wander off into woods or wilderness areas. As in the recent movie A Cry in the Dark, children can be wounded, killed, or carried off by wild animals. Frequently, in the wake of serious bicycle or automobile accidents, the rescuers or paramedics are unable immediately to identify the child or locate the family or are preoccupied with providing first aid, so the child becomes missing. In our complex, mobile society there also are many opportunities for children and parents to miscommunicate ("I said I'd be home from the camping trip on Sunday, not Saturday") and children are

thought to be missing. Then, too, there is the situation of many older children who, in adolescent rebellion, fail to return home at the appointed time. Not serious enough to be designated runaways, these children are still missed by, and frequently alarm, their parents.

Ironically, lost, injured, or otherwise missing children, although not usually crime victims, do in fact often become problems for criminal justice authorities. When children are lost, parents call the police, in part because they fear crime victimization and in part because there are few other agents available to help. Police need to know more about these events, if only to be able to distinguish them from other kinds of episodes.

Defining Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing Children

This is a heterogeneous category, including children who disappear for a variety of different reasons. These children, unlike other categories, are defined primarily by their "missingness" to their parents, not by some other common experience. This is the only category where 100 percent of the children in the category are literally missing.

Table LOM-1. Criteria for Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing Episode^a

Age	Time Missing
0 - 2	Any
3 - 4	2 hours
5 - 6	3 hours
7 - 10	4 hours
11 - 13	8 hours
14 - 17	Overnight
Disabled child	Any
Child injured during episode	1 hour

^a For more details, see paper on NISMART definitions

The main criteria to define the Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing child category were the age of the child and number of hours missing (Table LOM-1). Missingness raises alarm to different degrees depending on a child's age. As children get older and gain independence, longer unexplained absences are generally tolerated. Thus, the 1 hour absence of a 2-year-old would be much more alarming than the 1 hour absence of a 15-year-old. A special category covers those children with a disability or a life-threatening condition for whom even a short absence at any age might be the cause for alarm. The definition also recognizes the special nature of situations where children actually suffer serious physical harm or injury.

Ultimately, however, all such criteria have a degree of arbitrariness. For one particular 12-year-old who is always around the house, an absence of 20 minutes could be legitimately alarming. For another who is consistently absent-minded, a long absence could

raise no suspicion. Not finding a child in his bed in the middle of the night is very different from not finding him in the backyard in the middle of the afternoon. On the whole, the criteria used here are conservative. Many parents would be understandably alarmed well before these time periods.

Most of these Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing episodes resolve themselves without the involvement of the police or other authorities. However, when parents exhaust their own leads and resources and become even more seriously alarmed, the police are frequently called.¹ Because public officials are required to make a judgment about whether and how to intervene, and whether foul play may be involved, these kinds of cases are considered Policy Focal (Figure LOM-1).

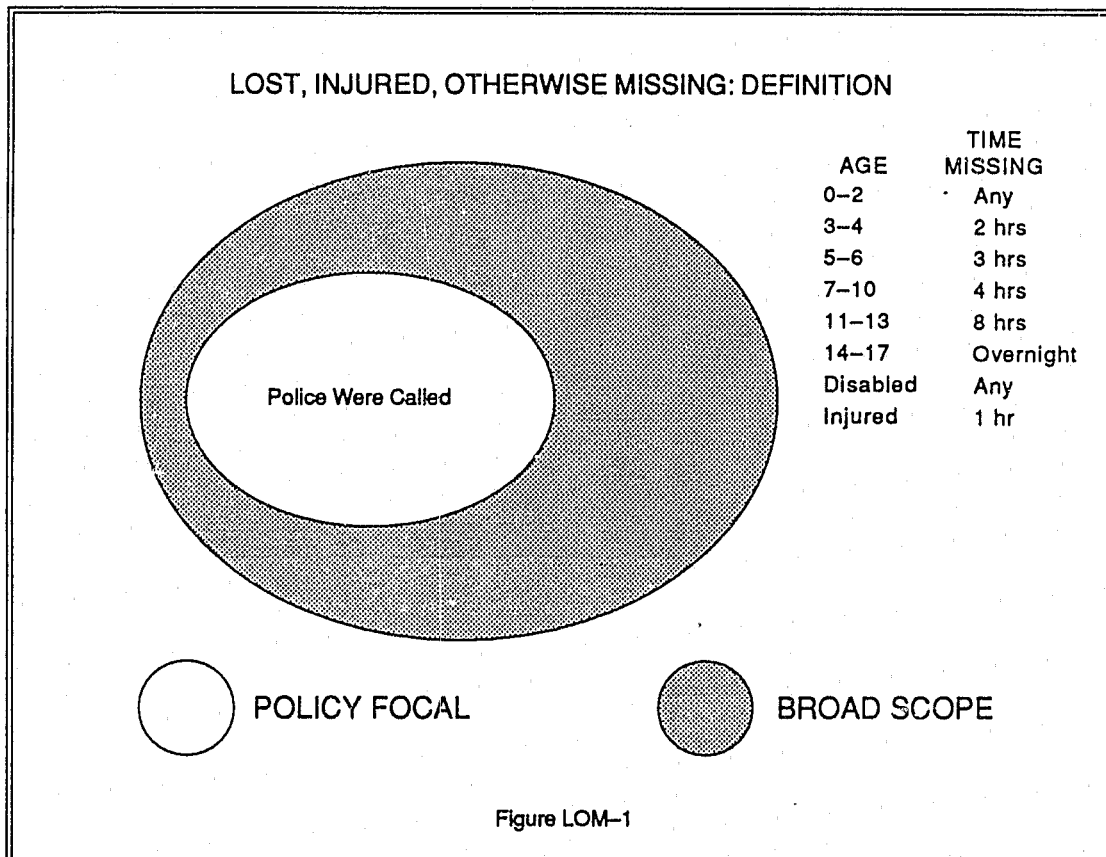
Thus, to reiterate, Lost and Injured (Broad Scope) are defined as children who are missing from caretakers for various periods of time, depending on the child's age, disabilities, and whether the absence is due to serious injury.

Lost and Injured (Policy Focal) are defined as any Broad Scope child about whom the police are called to assist in locating the child.

We need to also point out that a child who could be classified in one of the other categories studied in NISMART was not counted in this category. Thus, if a child disappeared because of an abduction or was a runaway (in other words, fit the criteria of

¹ Police are sometimes called even when the incident is not serious. But police involvement itself does make these cases of more policy interest.

one of these categories),² then the child was not counted as Lost or Injured. However, the simple element of parental fear that a child has been abducted was not enough to disqualify the child from this category. There had to be at least some reasonable evidence pointing to the abduction or runaway explanation.



² Even if the child had fit the other category because of a different episode.

Brief Review of Data Sources

The incidence estimates for this category come from the Household Survey portion of NISMART. In this telephone survey, interviewers talked to 10,544 adults who were caretakers of 20,505 children age 17 or younger, a representative sample of all such caretakers in the United States.³ A Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing child episode was screened through two questions:

1) "Was there any time [in the last 12 months] when [any of these children] was seriously hurt or injured and as a result didn't come home and you were concerned about where they were?"

2) "Was there any time when you were concerned because you couldn't find [any of these children] or they didn't come home?"

If caretakers answered yes to either of these screener questions, details were obtained about the episode. The definitional criteria were later applied to these details to decide whether the episode was countable within the incidence estimate.

In addition, some children came into this category through screener questions designed for other types of episodes, such as Non-Family Abductions or Runaways. When the details of these episodes were evaluated under our definitional criteria, it turned out that they did not qualify for the original episode type, but did for this one.

One clear strength of this methodology compared to a study of police or missing children's records is that it obtained

³ In actuality, a subsample of these caretakers was asked the Lost, Injured, and Otherwise Missing screener questions, but episodes could also come to the study's attention through other questions that were asked of every household with children, so any child could have potentially qualified.

information on many unreported or undocumented episodes. It was useful in understanding at what point in an episode or for what kinds of circumstances parents do contact police.

A drawback of the approach and matter of some concern is the possibility of forgotten episodes. A year is a long period over which to remember all episodes. If a child was recovered, for example, from a neighbor's house after a 4-hour absence, even if the police were contacted, such an episode might not be remembered. We hope that the extended questioning of parents about missing and taken children gave additional stimulus to parents' memories.

The Incidence Estimates

We estimate that 438,200 children had a Broad Scope episode of this sort in 1988 (Table LOM-2). Of these, 139,100⁴ or about 32 percent were Policy Focal episodes (Figure LOM-2). Policy Focal in this category meant that the episode was serious enough to prompt caretakers to call the police. Very few of these incidents were long-term. Unlike categories described earlier, however, they were all necessarily episodes where the caretaker had, in fact, missed the child for some period of time.

⁴ The estimate for Policy Focal Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing children has a large confidence interval. See Appendix I.

Table LOM-2. Estimated National Incidence of Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing Children, 1988

	Number of Children	Rate per 1000 Children 0-17
<u>Household Survey</u>		
Broad Scope ^a	438,200	6.95
Policy Focal	139,100	2.21

^a Includes Policy Focal

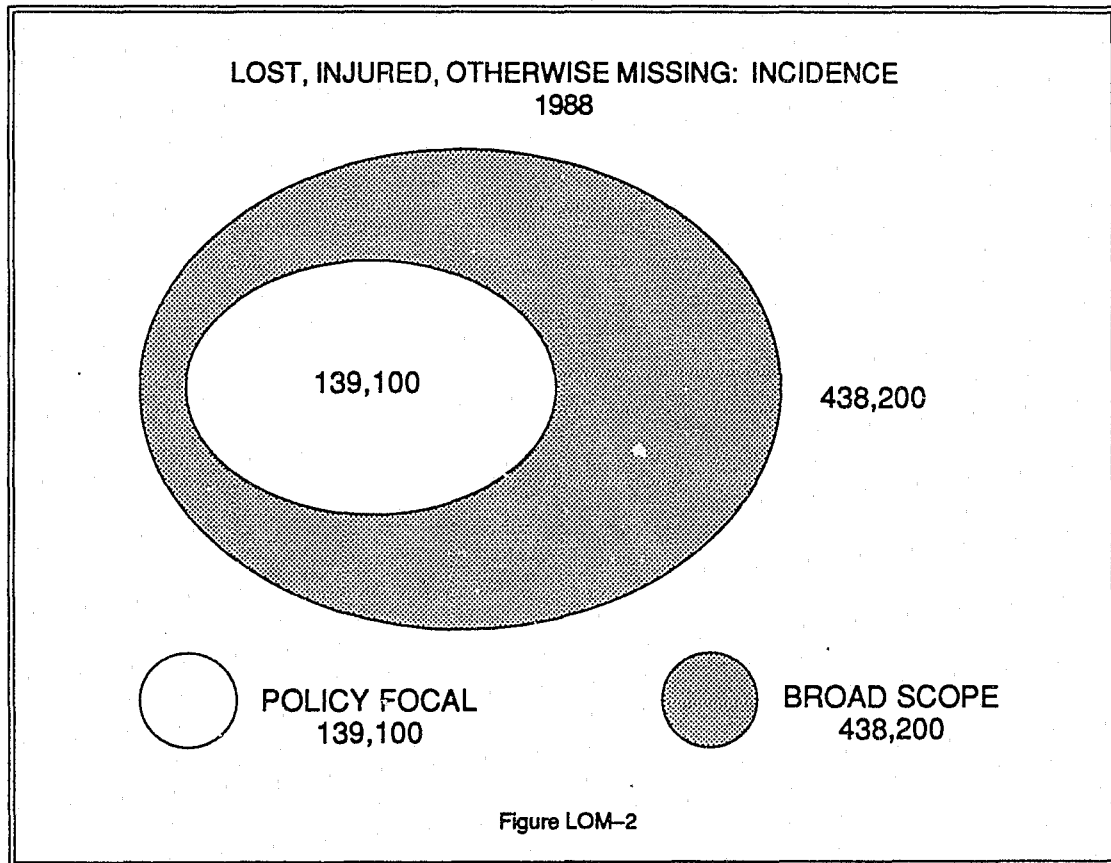


Table LOM-3. Age and Sex of Broad Scope Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing Children

	Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing % (Unweighted N=78) (Weighted N=438,200)	U.S. Pop %
Age		
0 - 2	27%	15%
3 ^b - 4	20%	11%
5 ^b - 6	1% ^a	12%
7 ^b - 10	4% ^a	21%
11 ^b - 13	9% ^a	15%
14 ^b - 15	6% ^a	10%
16 ^b - 17	34%	16%
Sex		
Boys	54%	51%
Girls	45%	49%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

^b Some children who were this age at the time of the study were a year younger at the time of the episode.

Demographics of Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing Children

As can be seen in Table LOM-3, two groups of children seemed to have experienced the large majority of incidents in this category: children age 0-4 and children 16-17. The reasons are obviously different for each group. Very young children are subject to intensive parental supervision and concern. So unexplained absences are quickly noticed and the source of much alarm. Moreover, our criterion for inclusion was quite broad for the 0-2 group, where an unexplained absence of any length of time was sufficient for us to count the child. Apparently, it is not

that uncommon for parents to have short, but alarming and memorable episodes where they cannot locate their very young children. These certainly include situations where babysitters and relatives caring for children fail to return on time or cannot be located, as well as situations where young children wander off.

The oldest age group, the 16- to 17-year-olds, have a lot of these missing episodes because they are the most independent children. In most States they can drive. They go off on their own for long periods and to distant destinations. They are involved in a fair amount of risk-taking and accident-prone activities. And they are the ones most likely to test, forget about, or misunderstand their degree of responsibility to inform their parents and caretakers of their whereabouts. Thus, even though they had to be missing overnight or injured to qualify for this category, the 16- to 17-year-olds were the largest group.

Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing episodes occurred to children who lived with both parents in smaller proportions than would have been expected, given the U.S. population (Table LOM-4).⁵ Living with both parents probably confers some protection because the family has two concerned adults to supervise and keep track of children.

⁵ See Chapter 3, Footnote #29.

Table LOM-4. Family Structure of Households With Broad Scope Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing Children

	Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing % (Unweighted N=78) (Weighted N=438,200)	U.S. Pop %
Both parents	35%*	66%
Single parent, no partner	28%	16%
Single parent, w/ partner	13%	7%
Neither parent	5% ^a	3%
DK/NA ^b	20%	8%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

^b Don't Know / Not Ascertained

* Differs from population estimate

In regard to other demographic characteristics, the patterns of gender, race and region were in line with proportions that would be expected on the basis of the total U.S. population (Tables LOM-3,5,6), with one exception. Hispanics were underrepresented (Table LOM-5) for reasons that are not clear.

Table LOM-5. Race and Household Income of Children in Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing Children

	Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing % (Unweighted N=78) (Weighted N=438,200)	U.S. Pop %
Race		
White	76%	71%
Black	20%	15%
Hispanic	1% ^{a*}	11%
Other	3% ^a	3%
Income		
< \$10,000	5% ^a	14%
\$10,000 - \$20,000	21%	20%
\$20,000 - \$30,000	22%	25%
\$30,000 - \$40,000	21% ^a	19%
\$40,000 ⁺	31%	22%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

* Differs from population estimate

There is also in Table LOM-6 a non-significant trend showing a disproportionate concentration of episodes from large cities and suburbs compared to the U.S. population. It is plausible that children in the modern world are more likely to get lost and to be missing in the generally more complex, fast paced interstices of urban life.

Table LOM-6. Region and Community Type of Broad Scope Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing Children

	Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing %	U.S. Pop %
	(Unweighted N=78) (Weighted N=438,200)	
<hr/>		
Region		
Northeast	24%	19%
Midwest	22%	25%
South	32%	35%
West	22%	21%
Community Type		
Large city	29%	18%
Suburb	35%	18%
Large town	8% ^a	18%
Small town	14%	27%
Rural area	14%	19%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Table LOM-7. Reason for Broad Scope Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing Episode

	Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing %
	(Unweighted N=78) (Weighted N=438,200)
<hr/>	
Reason	
Child hurt / injured	19%
Child got lost	6% ^a
Child forgot time	12% ^a
Child misunderstood expectations	9% ^a
Caretaker misunderstood expectations	10% ^a
Unforeseen circumstances caused delay	8%
Child defiance	4% ^a
Other	<1%
DK/NA	32%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Characteristics of Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing Episodes

When we look at the characteristics of episodes in the Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing child category, we see how heterogeneous a group it was. Unfortunately, there were many caretakers who did not get to answer a direct question about the reason for the missing episode.⁶ But among those who did answer,

⁶ There is more missing information for the characteristics of Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing Children than for other types of episodes in the Household Survey. This resulted from two situations. First, in this episode type, there was an unfortunate discrepancy between study definitions and the decision-rules that determined which caretakers would receive the extended interview form. So about 17 percent of households with qualifying episodes did not get the extended interview. Second, some Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing episodes were recorded on the forms used for other types of study episodes, because the episodes initially screened in as something else. When evaluated later, however,

the reasons were diverse. Truly lost children (i.e., children who lost their own way) accounted for a small percentage--6 percent of the total or 9 percent of those with responses (Table LOM-7). The largest group was hurt and injured children: 19 percent of the total or 28 percent of those with responses. The second largest group was children who forgot what time it was and thus failed to come or call home. There were also roughly equal percentages of children who misunderstood their caretaker's expectations, caretakers who misunderstood their children's expectations and situations where unforeseen circumstances caused a delay. Taking the forgetting, the misunderstandings and the unforeseen circumstances together, we would judge that almost two-fifths of the total children (three-fifths of those with known responses) could have been considered missing for benign reasons, not due to anything sinister.

Moreover, most of the Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing children were not gone an extended period of time (Table LOM-8). One-fifth were gone less than 2 hours, and one-third 5 hours or less. Less than 2 percent were gone more than 24 hours and only 1 percent had not yet returned at the time of the interview. It must be remembered that for a very young child, even a short period missing can be frightening, and if an episode ends in serious harm, the brevity of the absence is no consolation.

these episodes were reclassified as Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing, but these other episode forms lacked certain questions asked specifically about Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing situations.

Table LOM-8. Length of Child's for Scope Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing Children

Lost, Injured, or
Otherwise Missing
§
(Unweighted N=78)
(Weighted N=438,200)

2 hours or less	19%
3 - 5 hours	17%
6 - 8 hours	14%
9 - 12 hours	14%
13 - 24 hours	9%
24+ hours	<1%
Not yet returned ^a	1%
DK/NA	27%

^a At time of interview

Children disappeared from a variety of locales (Table LOM-9). Like children in other categories, many disappeared from their own home, but more in this category disappeared from the homes of others and in commercial areas. These certainly reflect young children who wander off in shopping malls and supermarkets.

Table LOM-9. Location of Child Prior to Broad Scope Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing Episode

	Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing %
	(Unweighted N=78) (Weighted N=438,200)
<hr/>	
Prior Location	
Own home	18%
Another home	10%
Street	<1% ^a
School	3% ^a
Commercial area	8% ^a
Other	10%
DK/NA	48%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

There were a variety of ways that parents first noted that the child was missing (Table LOM-10). The two most frequent were the child's failure to come home on time or failure to be at the place where he/she was expected to be.

Table LOM-10. Initial Indicator of Broad Scope Lost, Injured, or
Otherwise Missing Episodes

	Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing %
	(Unweighted N=78) (Weighted N=438,200)
Child failed to call at arranged time	6% ^a
Child failed to come at arranged time	16%
Child gone longer than usual	8%
Child not where expected to be	17%
Child disappeared from caretaker's presence	2% ^a
Other	2% ^a
DK/NA	48%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

Table LOM-11. Month, Day and Time of Broad Scope Lost, Injured, or
Otherwise Missing Episode

	Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing %
(Unweighted N=78) (Weighted N=438,200)	
<hr/>	
Month	
January	8% ^a
February	1% ^a
March	1% ^a
April	8% ^a
May	8% ^a
June	9% ^a
July	20% ^a
August	18%
September	7% ^a
October	9% ^a
November	5% ^a
December	6% ^a
Day	
Weekend	16%
Weekday	57%
DK/NA	27%
Time of Day	
Morning	4% ^a
Afternoon	29%
Evening	14%
Night	27%
DK/NA	26%

^a Based on fewer than 10 cases

A noteworthy observation about Table LOM-11, which shows the temporal clustering of Lost, Injured, or Other Missing episodes, is the concentration of events during the summer months. Almost 50 percent of the episodes occurred in June, July, and August. The

reasons for this clustering seem self-evident. These are the months when the usual routines of the school year are most disrupted, and the possibility for misunderstandings greatest. They are also months of travel, outdoor physical activity, and risk-taking. It is not surprising that summer is when children wander off, get lost, injured, forget when they are due home and disappear for a whole variety of reasons.

While many of the episodes were short, and others the product of a misunderstanding, some still created quite a bit of alarm and resulted in some degree of harm. In 32 percent of the Broad Scope cases the police were called (the Policy Focal cases). This suggests the degree of alarm to caretakers who had exhausted their own resources in their attempts to locate their children. Moreover, quite remarkably, 21 percent of the Broad Scope cases entailed some physical harm to the child (Table LOM-12), substantially more physical harm, for example, than was reported among the Broad Scope Family Abduction cases or Broad Scope Runaways. Physical assault and/or abuse were also present in 14 percent of the cases, substantially more than any category in this study except Non-Family Abduction. It must be remembered that one of the screener questions for this category specifically asked about children who were injured, and only an hour's disappearance qualified such an injured child for inclusion. This certainly helps explain the large proportion of physically harmed children in this category. The number of physical assaults is more of a surprise, however. These may have been children who got into

fights and brawls, particularly with peers, and were missing because of resulting injuries or delays.

Table LOM-12. Abuse or Harm to Child in Broad Scope Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing Episodes

Lost, Injured, or
Otherwise Missing
*
(Unweighted N=78)
(Weighted N=438,200)

Sexually Abused

Yes	1%
No	71%
DK/NA	28%

Physical Assault / Abuse

Yes	14%
No	57%
DK/NA	29%

Physical Harm

Yes	21%
No	52%
DK/NA	27%

Mental Harm

Serious	2%
Minor	<1%
Mild	3%
No	66%
DK/NA	28%

Conclusion

There are a substantial number of missing children--438,200 in 1988 by our estimate--who do not fall neatly into the more conventional categories of what have been labeled missing children

(the Abducted, the Runaways, and the Throwaways). For 139,100, the episode was serious enough that the police were contacted.

We have aggregated these children into a single category. But this is a mixed group, missing for a variety of reasons that do not necessarily have much in common and that defy easy generalizations. Many of these episodes are clearly misunderstandings: parents who think their children are at one place when they are really at another. In others, children lose track of time or rebel against their curfews. These episodes end after several hours with a sigh of relief and little harm.

But other important subgroups among these children--over one-fifth--are children who suffer some physical injury. They break a leg, have a bicycle accident, get sick. Some of these children (14%) actually experience a physical assault. When injuries and assaults cause children to become missing, we are discussing quite serious missing children's episodes. When children disappear for an extended time, it is also serious. Although the numbers in this category still missing at the time of interview are quite small as a percentage, in numerical terms they could be in the thousands.

More needs to be known about these groups of children. These children have not been studied or even written about in the current concern about missing children. An important first step is to differentiate the specific, distinct categories of such children. For example, for research we may need separate categories for the lost, the injured, the rebellious and the victims of misunderstandings. Or it may be better simply to subdivide this category into those who are missing and endangered

and those who are simply missing. When we know more about the range and variety of cases in this category, this will be an easier job.

But there are clearly children in this category who should be considered very serious missing children cases. And the size of the full category itself is alarming. There are almost as many Broad Scope and Policy Focal children in this category as there are in the Runaway category, which has received extended attention, research and funding. And a higher percentage of children in this category than Runaways were injured or assaulted. At least some of these children need to be elevated from their status as a "residual" category in the world of missing children.

We certainly need more research about these episodes. Are certain kinds of children or certain kinds of families more prone to these episodes? Do these episodes cluster in certain communities or neighborhoods? Do the police actually help solve many of the episodes or is the mystery usually cleared up independent of any police action? According to public health officials, there are 550,000 children taken to emergency rooms every year as a result of bicycle accidents:⁷ in how many of these are children missing to their families?

We also need to know more about prevention. Parents commonly take a number of steps to protect children from becoming missing. They teach young children their name, address, and phone number. They sew identification tags into clothes. They tell them to call

⁷ Runyan, C., & Gerken, E. (1989). Epidemiology and prevention of adolescent injury: A review and research agenda. Journal of the American Medical Association, 262(16), 2273-2279.

the police. Do these techniques work? Are there other or additional steps that parents should take?

One of the key policy questions is who should be responsible for these children. Law enforcement officials may sometimes wonder whether this is their bailiwick. Most of these children are not the victims or perpetrators of crimes. However, police do inevitably become involved in these cases. Caretakers phone police in almost as many cases here--139,000 per year--as in cases of runaways. When a child is lost, police get involved in the search, especially since it can be difficult to distinguish at first between these incidents and foul play. And in a fifth of these cases assault or abuse was present. But police do not deserve the full burden of this problem. To some extent this is also a public health concern. Children who are injured require emergency medical services, get taken to hospitals, and health officials have to locate their caretakers. It is also a child welfare problem. Children get lost sometimes due to neglect or poor supervision or high-risk parenting practices. Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing children do need some public officials to take the lead. Perhaps ideally, this could be a cooperative undertaking among law enforcement, public health, and child welfare officials.

The Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing children need to be the focus of some concerted attention by researchers and policymakers. This group of missing children has been unfortunately ignored. Yet the current research indicates that some of these children are seriously harmed and injured. A full mobilization about missing children must not overlook this problem.

LOST, INJURED, OR OTHERWISE MISSING SUMMARY SHEET

Incidence

- 139,100 Policy Focal children
- 438,200 Broad Scope children

Summary of Findings for Broad Scope Children

Profile groups

- Children 4 years or younger and 16 to 17
- Children without both parents

Circumstances

- Very common was misunderstanding or forgetting time
- A large group were hurt or injured
- A small group got lost
- Most common in summer

Duration

- One-third lasted less than 6 hours
- Only 1 percent not yet returned

Missing

- All children in this category were missing by definition

Police contact

- 32 percent police were contacted

Harm

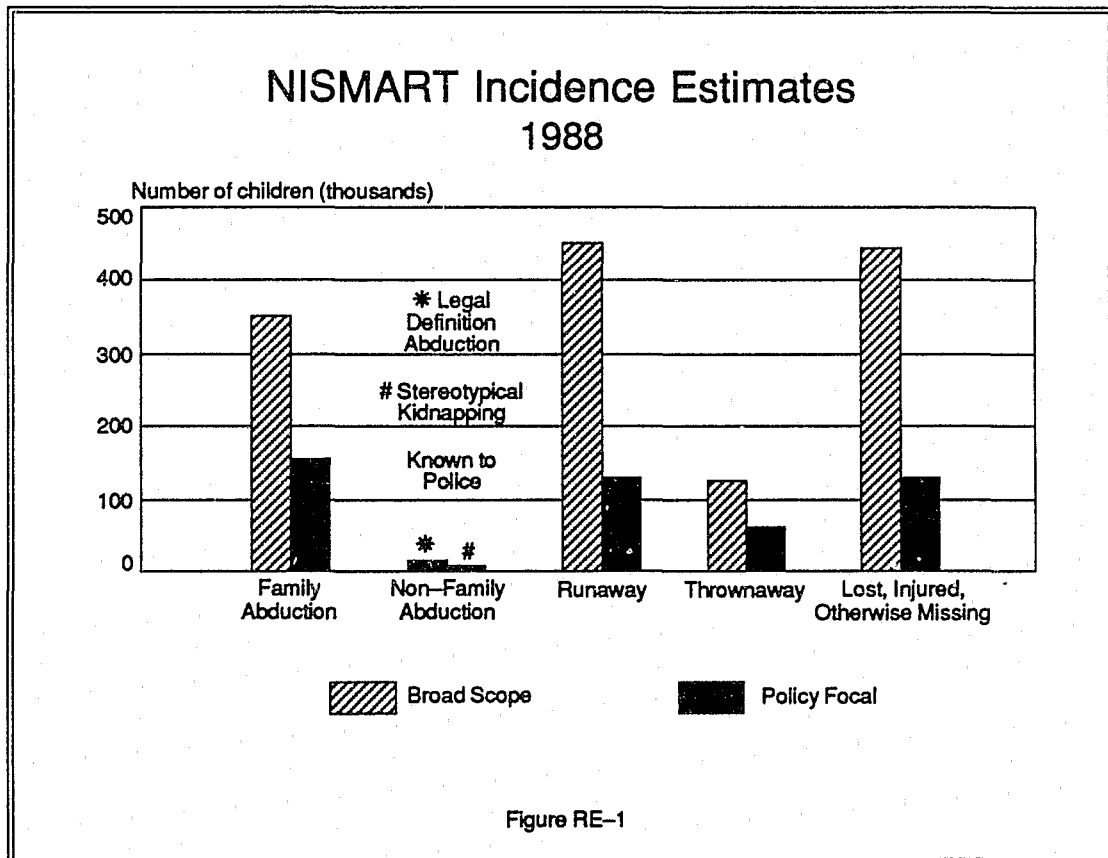
- 14 percent were assaulted or abused
- 21 percent experienced physical harm
- 6 percent experienced some mental harm
- Very few sexually abused

Chapter 8

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Summary

The primary goal of NISMART was to estimate the incidence of five categories of children, often thought of as "missing" or, as we have reformulated it, "missing or displaced" from their households. Looking at these incidence figures (Figure RE-1) and some related findings, several overall conclusions stand out.



First, the size of the family abduction problem is impressive: 354,100 Broad Scope and 163,200 Policy Focal cases. Widely quoted guesstimates usually projected this problem at about 25,000 to 100,000 cases annually. Although the Broad Scope definition used

in NISMART could indeed be considered broad; it does not explain the large number of these cases. A higher percentage of Family Abduction cases involved police contact than any other Broad Scope category in the study. Moreover, the Policy Focal cases in this category were more numerous than for any other category. Family abduction, almost any way we looked at it, emerged as a problem of major magnitude.

Second, the size of the Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing category--an estimated 438,200 Broad Scope cases--is also notable, especially considering that this group has been almost entirely ignored in the "missing children" literature. Moreover, all the children in this category were literally "missing," by definition, a fact that was far less true of the children in the other categories. As we noted in Chapter 7, however, this is clearly a mixed category, composed of many minor and some serious cases, and representing a variety of causes. But of particular importance, 21 percent of the Broad Scope children in this category experienced some physical harm, a higher percentage than any other category except Non-Family Abduction. And in 139,100 cases the police were contacted. NISMART findings clearly point to a need for more attention to this group.

The Runaway problem is also very large. The 450,700 Broad Scope Runaways made this the most numerous of all Broad Scope groups. The numbers in NISMART, however, were lower than in some other widely quoted studies, especially because we separated Throwaways who had been forced out from Runaways. Moreover, the NISMART findings suggest that the rate of running away is not any

higher in 1988 than in 1975, a possibly encouraging finding. In the context of NISMART as a whole, we would have to say that the common perception that runaways make up "the vast majority" of the children who have been categorized in the past as "missing children" needs to be revised. Runaways are numerous, but so are the children counted in the other categories studied by NISMART.

NISMART was the first study to examine the problem of runaways from juvenile facilities. Our estimate of the size of this group (12,800 children) did not substantially affect the overall estimate of Runaways based on the household survey because we found that many of the runaways from juvenile facilities had also run away from households in the same year. But we are concerned that our methodology may have undercounted runaways from juvenile facilities. And NISMART did confirm the perception that these particular runaways are a higher risk group who more often compel the attention of law enforcement. Thus, we see a need for more research attention to this group.

NISMART also made a much more concerted effort than many previous studies to distinguish Throwaways from Runaways. Our findings, especially from the Returned Runaway Study, point out the difficulty of doing this, especially without interviewing the children themselves. Nonetheless, NISMART findings did highlight some of the unique features of the Throwaway group: their older age, the greater amounts of violence prior to their departures, and their greater likelihood to remain away from home. We intend to further analyze the Throwaway-Runaway differences, but our

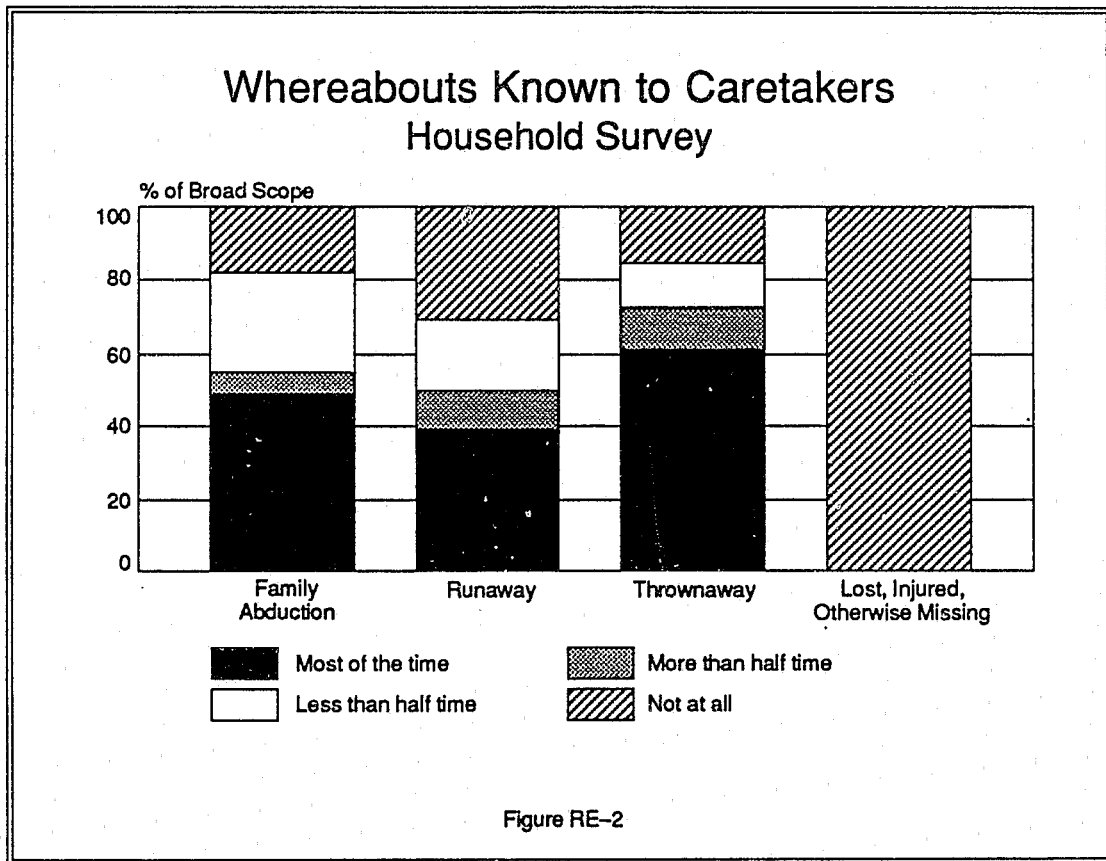
findings thus far underscore the importance and utility of distinguishing these two groups.

NISMART findings on Non-Family Abductions may appear reassuring to those who recall the estimate of 50,000 such children, which had been circulated by the press several years ago. We have, however, interpreted the NISMART estimates of this problem cautiously, because we believe there are many Non-Family Abductions, at least of the Legal Definition Abduction type, that are not reported to the police. Moreover, even those that are reported to police may not have been reflected in our estimate, because of the imperfections of police recordkeeping practices. At the same time, however, the Household Survey results suggest that the uncounted cases would still not raise the incidence of this category to a level comparable to the magnitude of the other NISMART categories--at least for those Legal Definition Abductions known to caretakers.

Perhaps the most important contribution of NISMART in understanding this problem, however, is the conceptual distinction between Legal Definition Abduction and Stereotypical Kidnappings. This distinction should go a long way toward allaying the public confusion, so that in the future it will not be assumed that statistics on Non-Family Abductions are all made up of stereotypical cases. We are fairly confident, moreover, that the number of these serious Adam Walsh-type cases is no more than 200-300 per year.

Another important contribution of this initial NISMART report is the clarification of the concept of "missing." Although all the

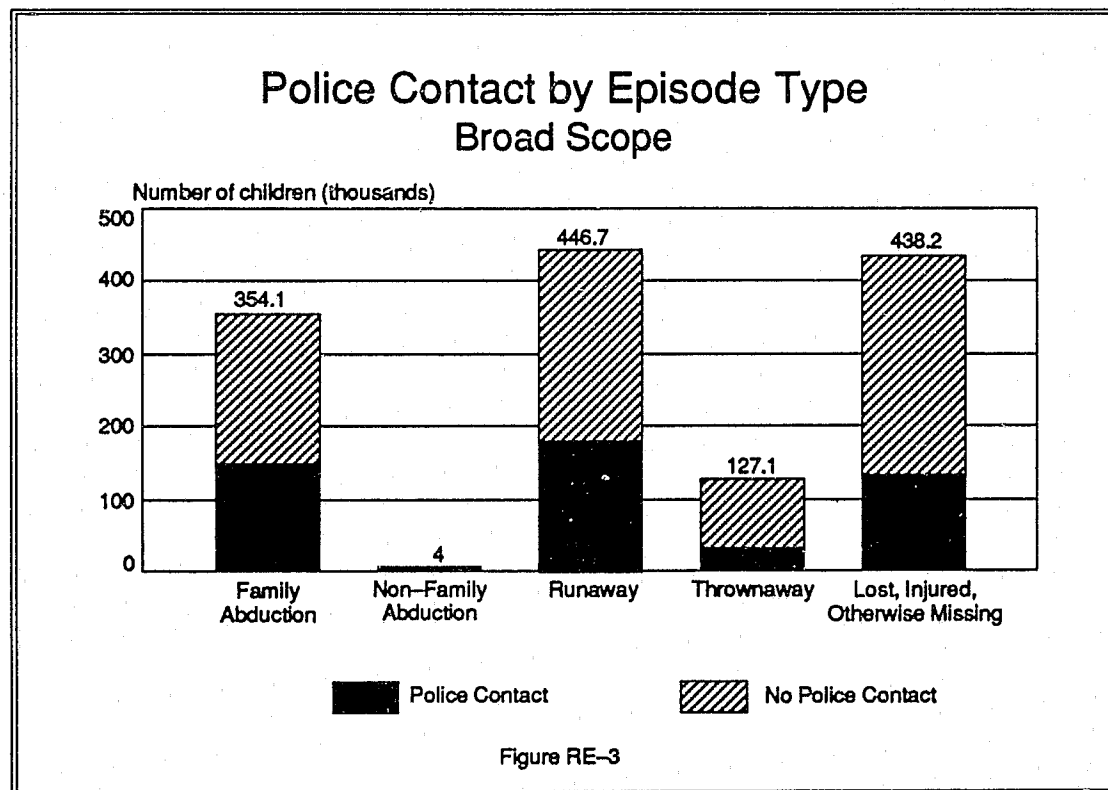
problems studied by NISMART have been termed part of the "missing children problem," in fact large numbers of the children in each of these categories were not strictly missing. Figure RE-2 illustrates that only a minority of Family Abducted, Runaway, and Throwaway children were missing during the whole episode, and the whereabouts of large numbers of these children were known to their caretakers most of the time. The children in the Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing category were "missing" by definition. Unfortunately, information on the "missingness" of Non-Family Abducted children was not systematically available in police records.



Still another set of important NISMART conclusions concerns the involvement of police (Figure RE-3). Police were not involved

in a relatively large number of the Broad Scope episodes. This is a sign that there is much more to these problems than the police generally see.

But the relative frequency and pattern of police involvement with these different kinds of children was also quite different from what might have been expected. The assumption by knowledgeable journalists and others¹ has been that the vast majority of cases of "missing children" coming to police attention were runaways. However, from Figure RE-3, it is apparent that police were contacted about almost as many Family Abductions and Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing children as they were about Runaways. Police contact for cases of Throwaways and Non-Family Abductions was quite small in comparison.



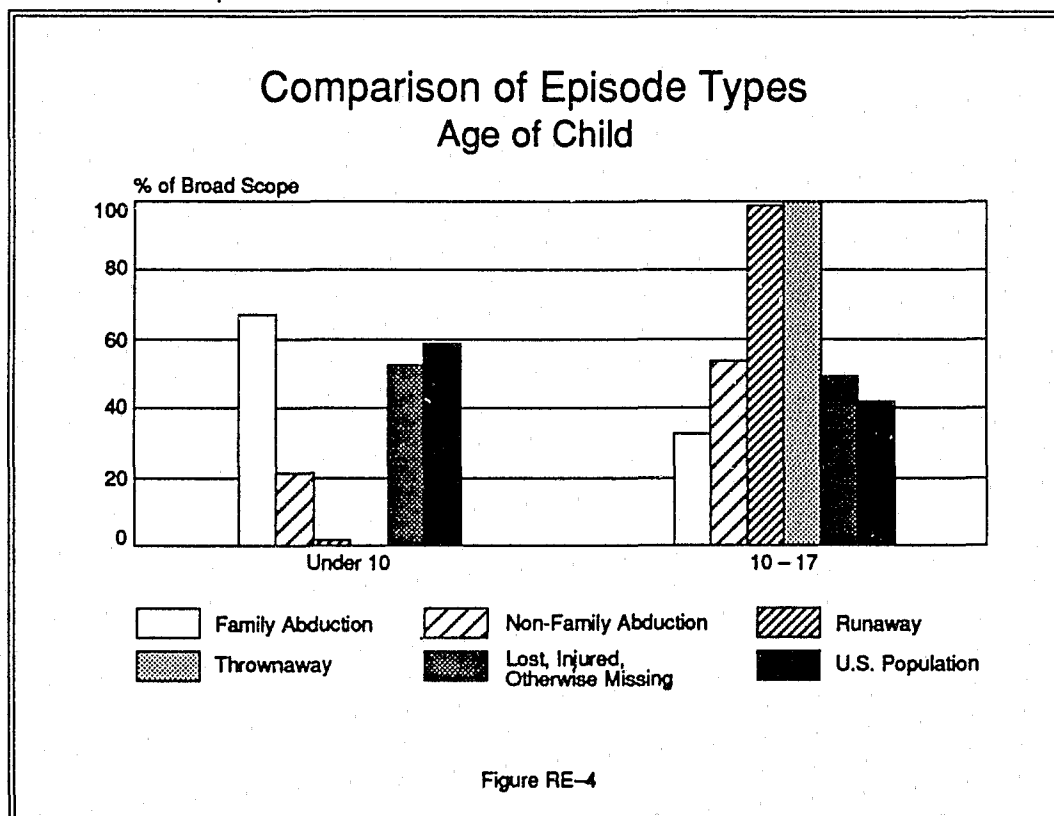
¹ Griego, D., & Kilzer, L. (1985). Exaggerated statistics stir national paranoia. Denver Post, May 12, 12A.

In interpreting Figure RE-3, however, a number of cautions must be observed. First, our knowledge of police contact in an episode came from the caretakers in the household survey. A person in a police station counting calls to the police might get a very different perspective for a number of reasons. For one thing, parents might not know or might not be accurate in their reporting of police contact in all cases. Even more important, our count in NISMART was of children, not of episodes. We know that a third of all runaways run on multiple occasions. Multiple Runaway episodes involving the same child are probably more common than multiple Family Abduction episodes, for example. If we had been counting episodes rather than children, the police involvement with runaways might have looked more disproportionate than it does in Figure RE-3.

Finally, we do not know whether all the police contacts mentioned to us by caretakers were actually reports of missing children. Certainly, in the case of Non-Family Abductions, many of these children came to the attention of the police because they had been raped or assaulted, not because they were missing. Even with Runaways or Throwaways, the police might have been contacted not because the child was missing, but because a crime was committed, or in the case of Injured children, because an accident took place. So from the police point of view, this contact might not have appeared as a missing child report. But what we can say is that from the perspective of caretakers, contacts with police did not occur primarily with Runaways to the exclusion of other types of episodes. Family Abduction and Lost, Injured, or

Otherwise Missing children generated a lot of police contact as well.

NISMART findings reflected the diversity of the problems. The five problems studied by NISMART covered a wide range of the misfortunes that can befall children, from having accidents, to becoming victims of crime, to being rejected by their parents and guardians. As we have emphasized in Chapter 1, these are largely different problems. Some of these differences, but also a few commonalities are revealed in a comparison of the problems by selected demographics and episode characteristics (Tables RE-1 and RE-2; and Figures RE-4, RE-5, RE-6, RE-7, RE-8, and RE-9)².



² Readers need to be cautious in drawing conclusions from Tables RE-1 and RE-2. The percentages often have a great deal of imprecision. No statistical tests have been calculated in contrasting these figures, so even differences that appear large may not be statistically significant.

First, these problems were rather dramatically different in the ages of the children they affected (Figure RE-4). Runaways were almost exclusively teenagers. Throwaways from households were also almost exclusively teenagers, but about three-quarters of the abandoned children were under age 10. By contrast, Family Abduction and Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing episodes affected comparatively more young children. Non-Family Abductions were more of a problem for teenagers than the stereotype has perhaps suggested (and the figure would probably have been even higher if it were not for a large amount of missing information regarding age).

Table RE-1. Comparison of Child Categories on Selected Demographics

	Family Abduction	Non-Family Abduction	Runaway	Thrownaway	Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing	U.S. Pop
Rate per 1,000						
Broad Scope	5.61	3,200 -	7.14	2.02	6.95	-
Policy Focal	2.59	4,600	2.11	.94	2.21	-
Child Age						
Under 10	67%	9 - 33% ^b	1% ^d	0% ^e	52%	59%
10 - 17	32%	55 - 50% ^b	99% ^d	100% ^e	49%	41%
Female	42%	74 - 89% ^b	58% ^d	53% ^e	45%	49%
Non-White	20%	62 - 74% ^b	24% ^d	38% ^e	24%	29%
Family Type						
Single parent	53%	- ^c	22% ^d	29% ^e	28%	16%
Single parent w/ partner	24%	- ^c	28% ^d	15% ^e	13%	7%

^a All NFA's were Policy Focal by definition

^b Range is due to two samples: National Sample and Four County Sexual Assault Sample

^c Family type information not available from Police Records

^d These %'s are based on 446,700 Broad Scope Household Runaways only. It excludes Juvenile Facility Runaways

^e These %'s are based on 112,600 Broad Scope Household Thrownaways only. It excludes abandoned children from Community Professionals Study

All percents are of Broad Scope episodes.

Numbers cannot be added or averaged across types of episodes.

Table RE-2. Comparison of Episode Types on Selected Characteristics

	Family Abduction	Non-Family Abduction	Runaway	Throwaway	Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing
Number of Children					
Broad Scope	354,100	- ^a	450,700	127,100	438,200
Policy Focal (#)	163,200	3,200-4,600	133,500	59,200	139,100
Policy Focal (%)	46%	-	30%	47%	32%
Gone					
more than 1 day	65%	1 - 4% ^b	72% ^e	74% ^f	2%
not yet returned	1%	2%	10% ^e	20% ^f	1%
Whereabouts not at all known	17%	- ^c	27% ^e	13% ^f	100%
Police Contacted	44%	100% ^d	40% ^e	23% ^f	32%
Physically Harmed	4%	14 - 21% ^b	1% ^e	<1% ^f	21%
Serious Mental Harm	16%	- ^c	6% ^e	1% ^f	2%

^a All NFA's were Policy Focal by definition

^b Range is due to two samples: National Sample and Four County Sexual Assault Sample

^c No assessment in Police Records Study

^d Study was based on Police Records. Undoubtedly there are NFA's that do not get reported to police

^e These %'s based on 446,700 Broad Scope Household Runaways only. Excludes Juvenile Facility Runaways

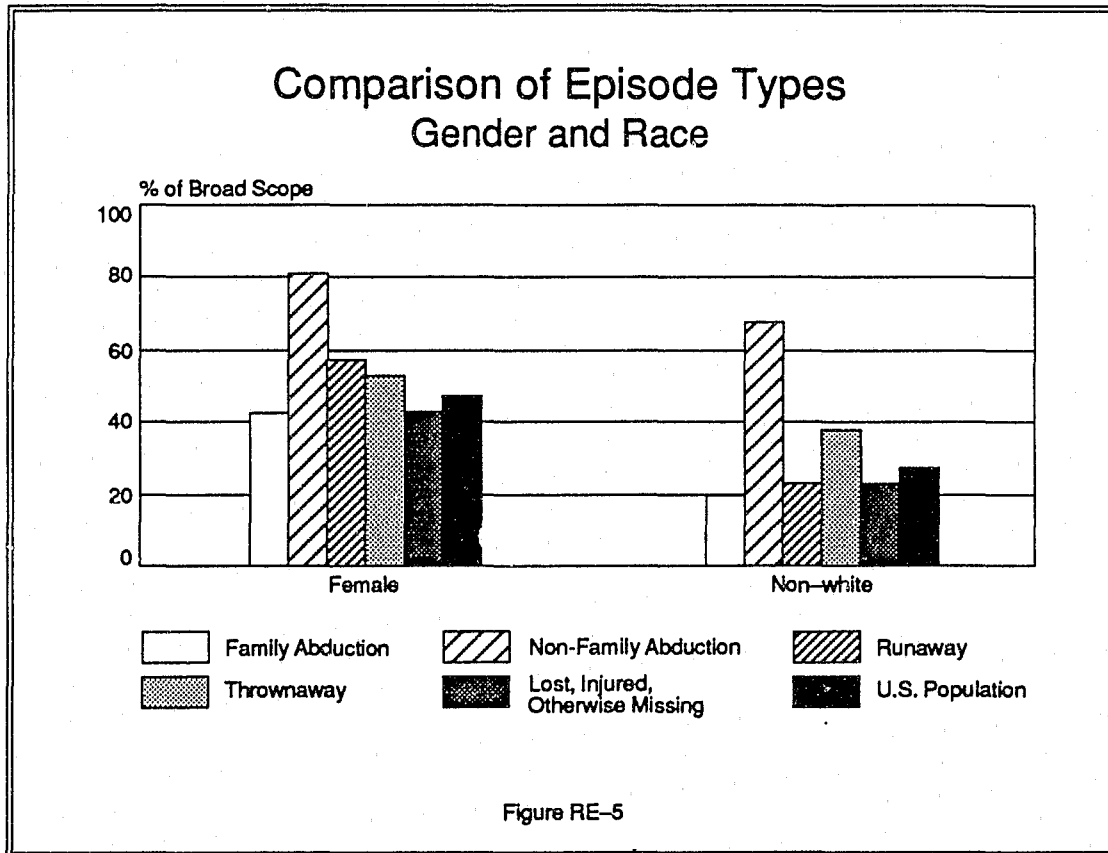
^f These %'s based on 112,600 Broad Scope Household Throwaways only. Excludes abandoned children from Community Professional Study

All percents are of Broad Scope episodes.

Numbers cannot be added or averaged across types of episodes.

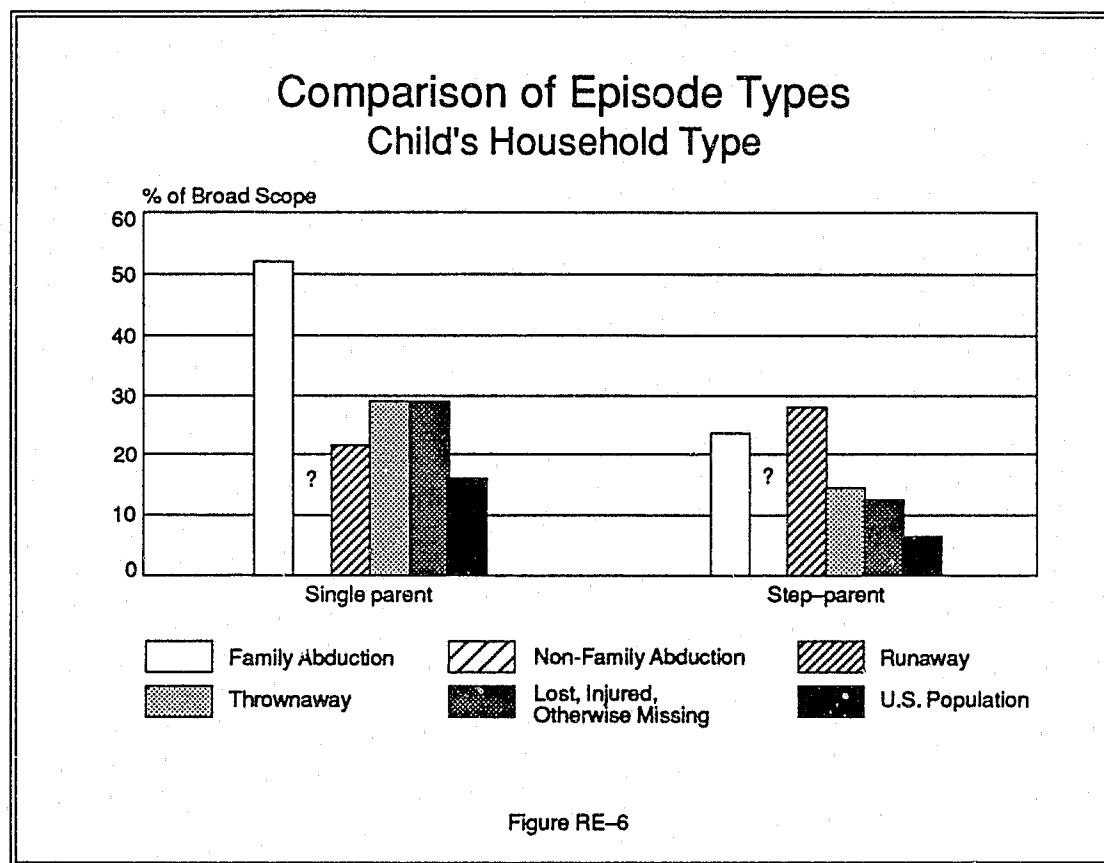
Another notable and contrasting feature of Non-Family Abduction, was its marked concentration among females (Figure RE-5). This stems, as we pointed out in Chapter 4, from the fact that

so much Non-Family Abduction occurred in conjunction with a sexual assault, a crime that is disproportionately directed at girls. The other problems affected roughly equal proportions of boys and girls.



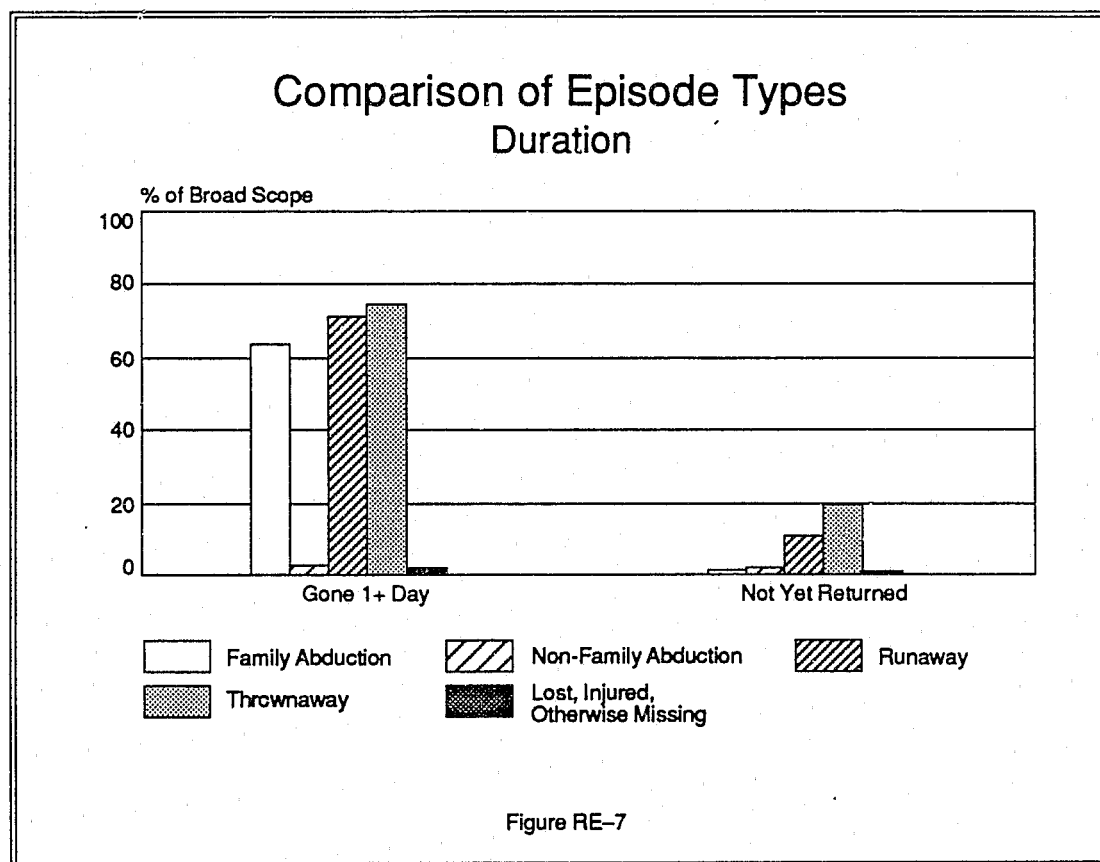
Non-Family Abduction was also noteworthy for having a marked disproportion of nonwhite victims (Figure RE-5). Nonwhites in general, suffer disproportionately from almost all violent crimes. Nonwhite children are undoubtedly vulnerable to Non-Family Abduction because they live in communities with high crime rates.

A smaller, but perhaps important disproportion of nonwhites also occurred among Throwaways, particularly among the abandoned children (not shown in Table RE-1, but see Chapter 6, Table TA-9). This was probably because poor households have more reason to exclude children who may be seen as an economic burden.



A commonality among all the problems studied in NISMART (except for Non-Family Abduction, where we had no data) was the large representation of children from families with single parents or step-parent figures (Figure RE-6). It makes sense that such families might have more conflict, less ability to supervise children, and numerous other problems that increase vulnerability to all the kinds of episodes studied here. However, clearly the

problem most connected to divorce and separation, and most distinguished by this connection, was family abduction, where only 4 percent of the affected children were living with both natural parents. Runaway children were also distinguished by coming from "step-parent" households (where one parent was living with a partner who was not the child's parent). It may be that the presence of a step-parent may be one of the causes of conflict and dissatisfaction that precipitates running away.



The NISMART problems can also be compared and contrasted to some of the important characteristics of the episodes themselves (Table RE-2). For example, there appeared to be important differences in their relative duration. Non-Family Abductions and

Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing were distinct because they were almost all likely to be over in a matter of several hours; rarely did they go on more than a single day (Figure RE-7). Runaways, Throwaways, and Family Abductions were generally of multiple-day duration (although keep in mind that 1 night and sometimes 2 nights were required by definition for many of these episodes). The as yet nonreturned children were almost entirely in the Runaway and Throwaway categories, with the Throwaways the higher of the two. Since the caretakers of Throwaways, in contrast to all other categories, often did not try to recover their children, it makes sense that this was the group with the largest percent who had not yet returned.

Categories varied somewhat, but not as much as some might expect, in the likelihood that the police would be involved (Figure RE-8). Excluding Non-Family Abduction, where our information came from the police, police were contacted in less than a majority of all the Household Survey Broad Scope episodes, ranging from 44 percent for Family Abductions to 23 percent for Throwaways. The lower percentage for Throwaways makes sense, since these were the caretakers who had the least interest in the well-being and recovery of their children. The higher percentage for Family Abductions is testimony to the seriousness with which caretakers took these episodes. (The 100-percent police contact for Non-family Abductions is misleading. There were certainly Non-Family Abductions that did not get reported to the police. However, our police record methodology made it impossible to know their extent.)

Comparison of Episode Types Police Contact

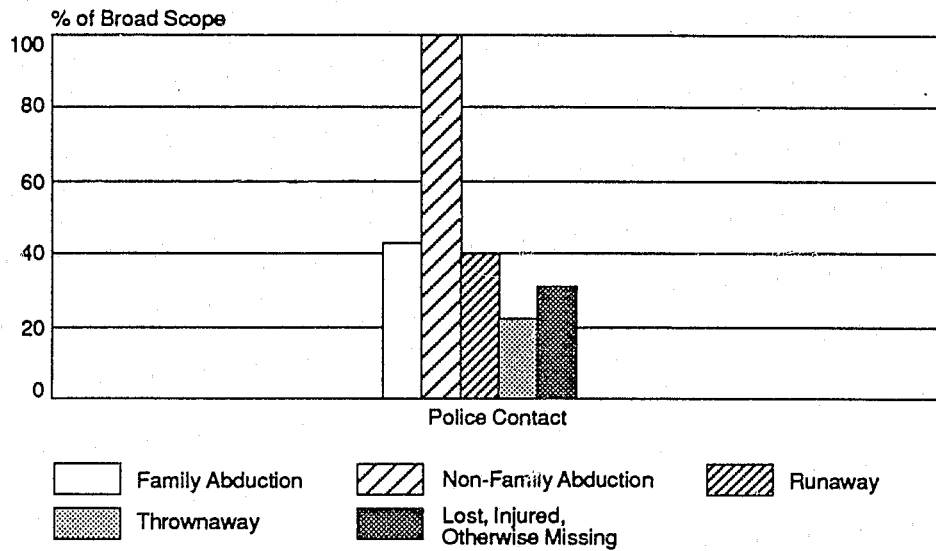
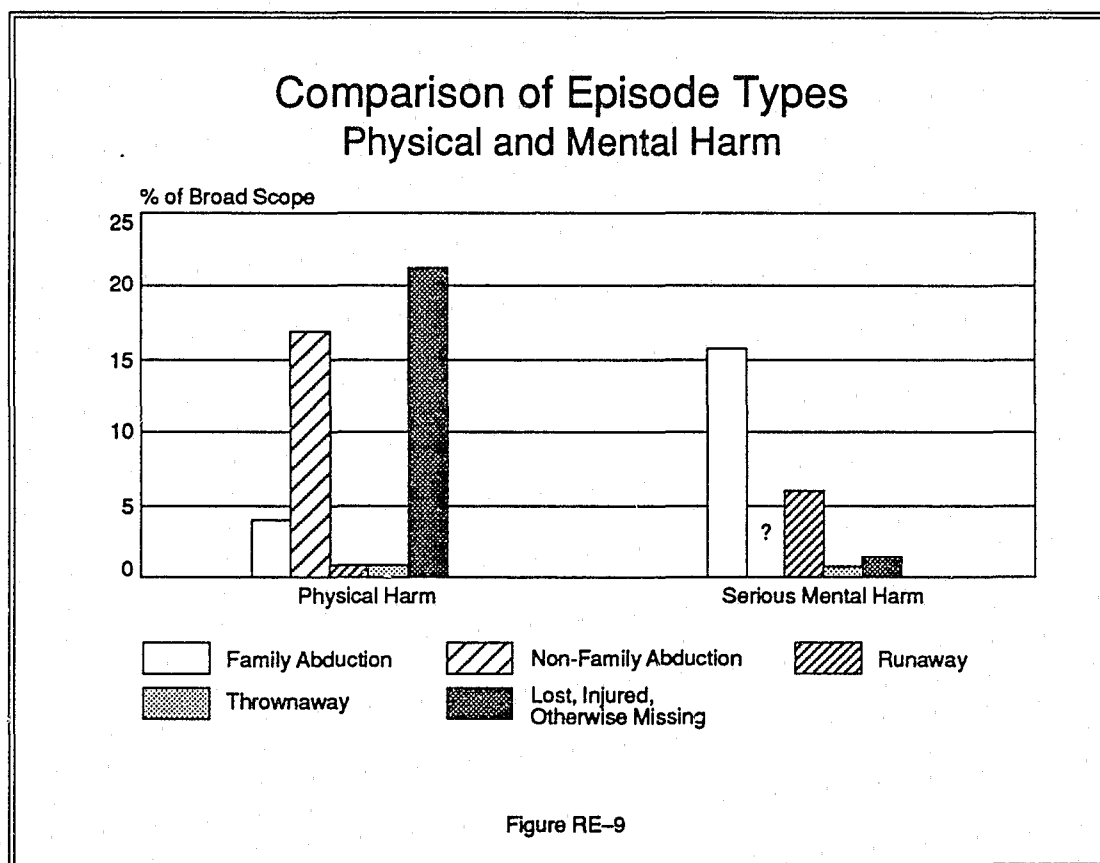


Figure RE-8

Finally, the categories appeared to differ in the degree of physical and mental harm suffered by the children (Figure RE-9). Non-Family Abductions entailed a lot of physical harm, undoubtedly more than is reflected in the percentages in Table RE-2 (a large number of police records had no information on physical harm). Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing episodes also entailed a fair amount of physical harm, because this category specifically included children injured in accidents and fights who as a result failed to come home when expected. Family Abduction is noteworthy for its degree of serious mental harm. It must be remembered, however, that these assessments of harm were subjective judgments made by the caretakers, who may not have known everything that

happened and may have had their own motives for minimizing or emphasizing harm. Thus, caretakers angry over the abduction of their child by an ex-spouse might be motivated to emphasize harm, whereas a caretaker trying to rationalize throwing a child out of the household might be motivated to minimize the incident. Thus, these comparisons must be made with great caution.



The comparison among the problems does emphasize their diverse nature and reinforces the NISMART conclusion that they merit being studied and analyzed primarily as separate problems.

NISMART Correspondence With Congressional Mandate

NISMART was conducted in response to a specific congressional mandate: "The administrator [OJJDP] shall ... periodically conduct national incidence studies to determine for a given year the actual number of children reported missing each year, the number of children who are victims of abduction by strangers, the number of children who are the victims of parental kidnappings, and the number of children who are recovered each year." (Missing Children's Assistance Act PL 98-473, Section 404(b) (3)). This law recognized the need for better statistics to inform policy and legislation on the "missing children problem."

The statistics and the percentages in NISMART's initial report provide a rich source of information responsive to this congressional mandate, and should prove useful in future policy discussions and legislation. However, NISMART both redefined and went beyond the specifics of the mandate. So it is worthwhile to draw attention to how various NISMART findings correspond to the mandate.

Several factors indicating the need for an incidence study to redefine and go beyond the congressional mandate were recognized by OJJDP consultants and advisers even prior to NISMART. First, since the legislation authorizing the study, knowledge in the field had progressed beyond the parameters of the legislation. New aspects of the problem and important distinctions came into currency that needed to be taken into account. Second, it was recognized that an incidence study would be an opportunity to gather much policy-relevant scientific information beyond that

mandated in the legislation, such as profile data on episodes. This goal required an approach that went beyond the authorizing legislation. Finally, formulating a scientific design for an incidence study, researchers quickly recognized that specific legislative wordings or definitions were, for the most part, too ambiguous to be the foundation for specific figures that could be scientifically defended. These are some examples of the definitional problems:

Congress defined a missing child as:

an individual less than 18 years of age whose whereabouts are unknown to such an individual's legal custodian if:

a) the circumstances surrounding such individual's disappearance indicate that such individual may possibly have been removed by another from the control of such individual's legal custodian without such custodian's consent; or

b) the circumstances of the case strongly indicate that such individual is likely to be abused or sexually exploited."

But these definitions presented conceptual problems for developing good measures. For example:

1) The term "whereabouts unknown" did not specify whether this meant for any particular length of time or in what detail the whereabouts needed to be known. This, combined with clause b, could potentially mean that any physically or sexually abused child would have to be counted, if parents did not know his/her

whereabouts at that moment. This is a far more inclusive notion of a missing child than most people have.

2) Legislation used the concept of "circumstances [that] ... strongly indicate that such individual is likely to be abused or sexually exploited," but it was unclear what this meant. Some people believe that any runaway who is away from adult supervision is likely to be abused or exploited. Others would include only those who run to areas where prostitution is rampant.

3) Legislation used the term "reported missing," but it is unclear whether this means reported to researchers or reported to police or some other other agency.

For all these reasons, NISMART researchers had to craft definitions to use in the studies that interpreted or in some cases differed in certain specifics from the literal congressional terminology. Nonetheless, the findings from NISMART and the data it provides are responsive to the congressional mandate, and the following presents the specific findings that respond to the legislation.

1) Family Abduction. The 1984 legislation specifically asked for the number of children who were "victims of parental kidnappings." Since 1984, the Federal Government and missing children's organizations have adopted the more inclusive term "family abductions," in recognition of the fact that other family members, beside parents, abduct children, often as agents of parents caught in custody disputes. Of our Broad Scope Family Abductions, 81 percent were perpetrated specifically by parents or parental figures, and two-thirds of the rest were perpetrated by

in-laws, suggesting that parental discord was influential as well. We believed that the family abduction concept was the appropriate, current concept for use in NISMART. The family abduction estimate most responsive to the legislative mandate is the Policy Focal estimate of 163,200 Family Abductions. These were the children whose abduction involved concealment, transportation out of State, or an intent to keep, and thus were the kind of cases that are of interest to law enforcement.

Not all these family abductions involved children whose whereabouts were literally unknown. NISMART found that caretakers knew the whereabouts of half the Broad Scope family abductions. However, this should not affect the number that corresponds to the legislative mandate. Our judgment is that although legislation defined "missing children" as those "whose whereabouts are unknown to such an individual's legal custodian," we believe at the time of this legislation there was not an appreciation that family abduction could occur without a child being literally missing. It is our judgment that congressional interest in family abduction included those serious cases where the child was "displaced" (not where he or she was supposed to be) as well as literally missing. And thus we believe that it is not advisable to apply a strict "whereabouts unknown" criterion to the Family Abduction estimate.

2) Non-Family Abduction. The 1984 legislation requested estimates for the "number of victims of abduction by strangers." By the time NISMART was undertaken, the convention in the Federal Government and other missing children's groups was to use the term Non-Family Abduction instead of stranger abduction. This

recognized two realities. First, the boundary between a complete stranger and an acquaintance is sometimes vague; children, for example, are often assaulted or kidnapped by persons they may have seen before on some occasions, and, while relatively unknown, are not complete strangers. Second, the division of abductions into "family" and "stranger" left out a large but important category of perpetrators, such as babysitters or neighbors, who also abduct children. Thus we see the Non-Family Abduction concept as the current and appropriate one. Our estimate of 3,200-4,600 Non-Family Abductions is the one most responsive to the legislative mandate. Of these, somewhat over half were actual strangers (but the exact percentage is obscured by some missing information and slight differences between the two samples from which the estimates come. See Chapter 4, Table NFA-7).

This interpretation of the legislative mandate, as in the case of Family Abduction, is not confined simply to Non-Family Abductions where the child was literally missing to the parents. Unfortunately, police records did not usually contain information on whether the guardians missed the child, so NISMART has no good information on what proportion of Non-Family Abduction children's whereabouts were unknown to caretakers. But more important, it is our judgment that Congress was interested in abduction more broadly--in children who were "displaced" as well as literally missing. Thus, we do not believe it necessary to apply a strict whereabouts-unknown criterion for Non-Family Abduction.

3) Runaways, Throwaways, and Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing. The 1984 legislation that authorized a national incidence

study requested the "actual number of children reported missing each year," but made no specific mention of other categories like runaways. However, from very early in the public concern about missing children, runaways have been considered part of the problem. There was substantial early debate, however, about whether all runaways or only some subgroup of runaways should be included. Congress appears to have opted for the subgroup approach because in P.L. 98-473, in the portion of the definition that applied to other than abducted children (section b, page 321), it was required that such children be in circumstances that indicated a likelihood for abuse or sexual exploitation. Thus, among the nonabducted, the interest was primarily in those at risk for abuse.

In the years since the 1984 legislation, there has been much additional debate and discussion about which other children belonged within the category of missing children. The original concept of runaway more and more frequently was separated into runaways and throwaways, as it was recognized that some children's caretakers simply forced them out or did not want them back. By the time of NISMART, enough research and policy supported this distinction that it was deemed important to estimate throwaways separately. NISMART findings on the profile differences between what we called Throwaways and Runaways validated this decision.

Since 1984, there had also been some discussions in the "missing children" literature about lost children. But few writers or organizations included these children as a formal category. However, when we designed NISMART we recognized that there were children such as lost children and even others, who might be

literally missing, but who were not captured by any of the traditional "missing children" categories. We included questions designed to inquire about such children, whom we termed "Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing." One of the more surprising findings of the study was the large number of such children that we identified.

Thus, the developments in the field of missing children have led us to several conclusions about what additional numbers should be included in response to the Congressional Mandate of 1984.

First, we believe that Runaways were meant to be included in the mandate. Interim research has convinced us that Throwaways should be included, too, as a separate group.

But Congress clearly opted for an approach that only counted a subgroup, not all runaways (and by extension not all throwaways). Congress in 1984 appeared to be primarily interested in the subgroup of nonabducted children who were at risk for abuse. Unfortunately, as we have indicated, this concept is a somewhat problematic one, because "risk for abuse" can be difficult to specify and difficult to measure. For Runaways and Throwaways, we defined high-risk children as those without a "secure and familiar" place to stay. This distinction was intended to separate Runaways and Throwaways who were relatively secure, such as in the homes of friends or relatives; from those on the street, or in shelters, or in the company of strangers. Runaways and Throwaways without a secure and familiar place to stay were almost certainly at higher risk for physical and sexual abuse. Thus, we propose the

127,100 Policy Focal Runaways and 59,200 Policy Focal Throwaways as the ones most responsive to the congressional mandate.

Here again, in proposing the Policy Focal Runaways and Throwaways as the appropriate figures, we are bypassing the ambiguous congressional criterion that the children's whereabouts be literally unknown to caretakers. As NISMART found, many caretakers do know the whereabouts. In Chapter 5 and 6, we noted that 48 percent of the caretakers of Runaways (Broad Scope) and 73 percent of the caretakers of Throwaways (Broad Scope) claimed to know the whereabouts of their children more than half the time. But as we have pointed out, the congressional concept of whereabouts unknown was very difficult to interpret. And more important, we believe the concepts of Runaway and Throwaway and the concept of risk are not dependent on whether the guardians know the child's whereabouts. In fact, for throwaways, many of whose parents do not care where the child is; knowledge of whereabouts seems particularly irrelevant as a criterion. Thus, we do not believe it to be helpful to limit the response to the congressional mandate to only those Runaways and Throwaways whose whereabouts were literally unknown to their caretakers.

4) Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing. This category poses the greatest ambiguity with respect to the legislative mandate. The mandate did not anticipate this category, and in fact it had been given little recognition before the current study delineated its magnitude. However, it is our judgment that future policy about missing children will increasingly incorporate this category, both because of its size and because it clearly contains some

serious cases. Thus, some portion of this category needs to be included within the purview of the 1984 congressional mandate.

Unfortunately, relatively little is known about the nature of these episodes, and NISMART has yet to do an intensive analysis of this category. Currently, we do know that 14 percent of the 438,200 Broad Scope children identified in this category experienced some physical assault or abuse. In keeping with the congressional interest in the subgroup of nonabducted children who were at risk of abuse, we would propose, for the moment, this subgroup as the one that most corresponds to the 1984 congressional mandate. However, this recommendation may be modified upon further analysis of the data.

5) Total number of reported missing. P.L. 98-473 clearly envisioned a global number of missing children. As we argued in Chapter 1, however, we believe that the ensuing discussion and research, including NISMART research itself, has challenged the advisability of a number that aggregates the separate problems identified here. These problems are very different, affect different children, and involve different public agencies. Moreover, the aggregation of these problems in the past has led to a great deal of confusion and unwarranted public panic. In part it has resulted in the labeling of children as "missing" who were not truly missing. And it has also contributed to serious misconceptions about the incidence of Non-Family Abduction, since many people equate "missing children" with just this subcategory. Perhaps, most important, such aggregation also does not serve any apparent real policy need. Thus, we consider the most responsible

and defensible approach to be the presentation of estimates for each of the separate problems potentially envisioned in the legislation and we believe that this fully satisfies the concerns underlying the congressional mandate.

6) Children who returned. The 1984 legislation requested estimates of the children who are "recovered each year." In the context of the study, we interpreted this to mean the children who returned home at the end of their episode and thus were not still gone from the home at the time of the study. The vast majority of children who had episodes relevant to NISMART did return: 99 percent of the 354,100 Broad Scope Family Abductions; 98 percent of the 3,200 - 4,600 Legal Definition Non-Family Abductions; 90 percent of 450,700 Broad Scope Runaways from Households; 80 percent of Broad Scope Throwaways from Households and 99 percent of the Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing. We suspect that policymakers really are seeking the numbers of children still gone from their homes after an extended period of time. Unfortunately, we have found that these numbers are so small in most categories of episodes that they cannot be measured with the methodologies used by NISMART. Our conclusion for future studies is that if a very precise estimate of the number of "nonrecovered" children is needed, much larger samples will be required.

Limitations of the Study

The goal of NISMART was to provide the best possible scientifically based national estimates and information about the various missing children problems, and we believe it has succeeded

in greatly advancing knowledge and conceptualization of these problems. But the scope and nature of these controversial problems were only partially understood at the time NISMART was being designed. Not surprisingly, such uncertainties, not to mention the constraints of time and budget, all imposed limitations on NISMART, some of which were recognized from the beginning and some of which only became clear in the course of the study. A more systematic inventory of these limitations is available in the methodological reports on the various NISMART components. But some of the limitations are so important that, although they have been mentioned previously, they need to be reiterated here. They are cautions that all readers must remember in interpreting and utilizing the NISMART findings.

1) Only initial findings. The findings presented here are based only on initial analyses of the data. The total information in the NISMART studies is enormous and complex, and what has been presented so far is just the tip of the iceberg. It is possible that subsequent, more intensive analyses of the data will change some of the findings or conclusions in this report or show them in a different light.

2) Lack of consensus about definitions. NISMART findings, especially the incidence estimates, are quite dependent on definitions. This is well-illustrated by our findings about Non-Family Abduction, where the estimate using the Legal Definition Abduction is over 10 times larger than the estimate of Stereotypical Kidnapping. Yet there were few clear, precise, preexisting, widely agreed upon definitions that NISMART could

adopt. Definitions had to be crafted for NISMART using a variety of expert consultants and resources. On a variety of important definitional matters there was little empirical information available to guide NISMART efforts.

Undoubtedly, there will be readers who will disagree with some of the definitions used by NISMART or prefer other criteria. The implications of various definitional decisions have not yet been fully analyzed, and will be a subject of subsequent analyses. Readers should keep in mind that changes in definitional criteria might result in important changes to incidence estimates and other conclusions.

3) Limitations of caretaker perspective. Four of the estimates in NISMART--for Family Abduction, Runaways, Throwaways and Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing--relied heavily on information gathered from a single, uncorroborated caretaker in a telephone interview. There are many reasons why this information could have been inaccurate or biased. For example, in the case of Family Abduction, the bitter feelings left from marital conflicts and custody disputes may have biased the perspective of caretakers in reporting on the actions of their former partners. In the case of Runaways or Throwaways, the strong feelings created by parent-child conflicts may have biased parent reports about their children's behavior. Moreover, the study was obliged to rely on information from caretakers about events that they had not witnessed and that they had to have learned about from their children. There is good reason to suspect that in some cases children may have misled parents or withheld some information.

There are many possible sources of inaccuracy and bias in such data.

Concern about these limitations was readily confirmed by the Returned Runaway Study. In this study, where we did have the perspectives of two respondents on a single incident (both the child's and the parent's), we found a substantial amount of disagreement over the the details (although not the existence) of an episode. These differences on details did affect the countability of incidents for purposes of estimating incidence. We believe, for example, that the estimate of Runaways would have been perhaps 11 percent higher if we had systematically interviewed children instead of parents. Thus, readers should be aware that estimates based on a single, uncorroborated caretaker have limitations.

4) Limitations of other data sources. There are also suspected inaccuracies of undetermined size in estimates that come from other sources beside caretakers. The data from the police records on Non-Family Abduction have a number of problems. There were considerable missing data that police did not record. The police also did not use uniform definitions for the information they did record. And most important, we are certain that there were episodes of interest to the study that did not come to police attention. So we believe we have underestimated the size of the Non-Family Abduction problem--not so much the Stereotypical Kidnappings as the short-term episodes that occur in the course of other more salient crimes like rape, assault, and child molestation.

The data from the Juvenile Facilities also had limitations. We believe that we missed some juvenile facilities, and thus undercounted the number of Runaways from such facilities.

The data from the Community Professionals Study also had certain limitations similar to the Police Study. We believe that there were some abandoned children (a number we cannot estimate) whose episodes never came to the attention of agencies and professionals. The study thus could not count these children.

Finally, the analysis of FBI data suffers from some limitations well known to those who use FBI homicide data. The primary problem for the current study was the large amount of missing and undetermined information in regard to the characteristics of interest to the study.

Despite these limitations, NISMART provides a more comprehensive and systematic look at many of these problems than has previously been available, and provides an important foundation on which to build future research concerning their nature and incidence.

Recommendations

Based on work that went into analyzing and defining the problem, as well as these initial findings, we have developed eight recommendations for clarifying and improving public policy on these problems. We also have some recommendations for future research.

Policy Recommendations

1) First, public policy on what has become known as the "missing children problem" desperately needs to clarify the limits of its domain. As this study has illustrated, there is a great deal of confusion in the public and among policymakers about which children and which situations should be included in the domain and how they should be collectively described. The bringing together of family abductions, non-family abductions, runaways, and throwaways is a relatively new policy innovation and many people have not understood this development. Most important, the term "missing children" has not adequately or accurately described this domain. Many people continue to think of missing children as simply victims of stranger abductions.

The present study has uncovered additional problems in demarcating the domain. It has shown that large portions of problems like family abductions and runaways cannot be easily categorized under the rubric "missing children" because the children are not literally missing. Moreover, the present study has also highlighted the fact that there is a large category of literally missing children--the lost, injured, or otherwise missing--that has not really been included in the domain at all.

In view of these problems, we recommend that, to the extent that it is deemed useful to unify these problems for purposes of social policy, some expanded or alternative rubric be employed. One possibility is the concept of Missing and Displaced children. Most of the children in these categories who are not literally missing are "displaced" (i.e., not where they are supposed to be).

Thus, a child abducted to his father's house in violation of custody may not be missing but is displaced. The same is true of a child who runs away to the house of a friend or relative.

An alternative to the term "missing and displaced" is to use the rubric adopted for the present study: Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Throwaway Children. Although this is lengthy and a bit cumbersome, it does delineate more fully the categories of children. It would foster much less confusion than the term "missing" by itself. In either case, some portion of the children categorized in this study as the Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing should be included within this domain.

2) As part of the same clarification process, public policy in this area needs to clearly differentiate each of the social problems. These problems are not clearly differentiated at the current time and the result is public and professional confusion. For example, the common term "abduction" implies the existence of similarities between family and non-family abductions, when these are, in fact, very different problems. Runaways and throwaways have often been lumped together, when they too can be radically different. And as mentioned earlier, many people still think "missing children" means only stranger abductions. All these individual problems need to be clearly distinguished.

This study has highlighted the differences among these problems. These problems occur to different groups of children. Different risk factors are involved. Different institutions and social agencies have responsibility. Even different areas of the country disproportionately experience them.

A number of recommendations flow from these findings. First, future research on these problems should for the most part take up these problems individually. Combined studies of runaways and throwaways are probably justified, given the common connections and difficulty of clearly differentiating them in an objective manner (one not dependent on the interpretations and perceptions of the involved parties). But combined studies of runaways and abductions, or even of family and non-family abductions are not warranted. The dynamics of these problems, their causes and remedies, and the institutional frameworks in which they fit are just too different. Mixing them together does not allow research to do them justice.

Second, the individual identities and character of the separate problems need to be clearly emphasized in literature, publications, and discussions of missing children. This can be done by separate brochures, separate chapters, separate specialists --whatever needs to be done to delineate the categories in a clear way.

Third, agencies and decisionmaking bodies in the domain of "missing children" should have officials and representatives knowledgeable about each of these problems and able to keep the full range of issues involved in sight on a consistent basis.

3) As still another part of the clarification process, public policy needs to define precisely what portion of each problem it wishes to address. The NISMART studies have demonstrated very clearly that each problem consists of a broad spectrum of situations. Runaways range from children who circle the block to

children who disappear forever into the criminal underworld. A family abduction can mean an extra night in a house down the block or a permanent departure to a foreign country. Unfortunately, there is no public or policy consensus about what is a "real" runaway or a "real" family abduction. Current congressional definitions are not sufficiently specific.

An urgent task for policymakers is to forge this consensus. We believe it may be possible to do this using the concept of Policy Focal, which we have developed in the course of these studies. The concept of Policy Focal can be useful in demarcating the portion of each problem that policymakers want to concentrate on, without having to deny that there are many "real" abductions, runaways, or missing children outside this domain. Policymakers may or may not want to adopt the exact definitions of Policy Focal that have been developed for this study. Although these definitions have been carefully crafted and are based on objective and relatively unambiguous features, they have been developed primarily for purposes of research, and thus may not be entirely suited to policy purposes. Nonetheless, they are a foundation that can be used in constructing definitions more appropriate for policy.

4) Turning now to some of the specific problem areas, we recommend greatly increased attention to the issue of family abductions. This is a problem whose dimensions proved to be substantially larger than most people had anticipated. Given the kinds of social conditions on which this problem feeds--divorce, mobility, custody fights--we think it is probably the most rapidly

growing problem considered here, although such a conclusion is beyond the scope of the study data. It is certainly the problem with the shortest research or public policy history.

We recommend that the major focus in family abductions be placed on prevention. Finding and recovering family-abducted children is certainly important, but this may also be one of the most easily preventable problems. Much family abduction is undoubtedly a failure of the child custody system to promote negotiation, communication, and compromise as a solution to custody problems. Legal processes, because they are slow, inflexible, and intimidating, can readily generate the frustrations that lead to abductions. These are aspects of the custody process that can be ameliorated. Still other family abduction may be prevented through better anticipation and deterrence. As we begin to know more about high-risk custody cases, it may be more feasible to educate and dissuade the parties involved. Judges, attorneys, and children's guardians may be able to short-circuit potential family abductions by becoming educated and aware, and by addressing this possibility more directly, discouraging this solution, explaining the consequences. Abduction prevention has a high potential for success.

5) We recommend that efforts be made to clarify public and professional understanding about non-family abductions. Central to this is the need to subdivide the non-family abduction problem into at least two categories. In NISMART, we have called these two categories, Legal Definition Abductions and Stereotypical Kidnappings. Other terminology may be desirable--for example,

"abduction" vs. "kidnapping" or "primary abduction" vs. "secondary abduction"--but the categories must distinguish the more serious stereotypical kidnappings from short-term abductions in the course of other crimes. This is a distinction every bit as important in criminology as the distinction between forcible and statutory rape or between simple and aggravated assault. It needs to be formalized in criminal law as well as in recordkeeping systems. And if used conscientiously by people discussing non-family abduction, it will clear up much confusion and lead to better public policy.

6) We recommend that all policy, publication, and research on the problem of runaways be required to take into account the problem of throwaways. When children leave home in the course of family conflict, this has unfortunately in the past been discussed primarily as the concept of "running away." But the stereotypes about runaways frequently exaggerate the degree of voluntariness and mask the role of the caretaker. These youth are not helped by research and policy based on such stereotypes, that misrepresent their situation. It may be particularly dangerous to think of them as "missing children who need to be returned to their homes," since in some cases their homes may be the place where they are at most risk. The concept of throwaway more accurately conveys the situation of many of these youth, and alerts policymakers and professionals to the hostile family situation. From the present research, it is clear that a large number of children who have previously been seen as runaways are better classified as throwaways. Unfortunately, however, this reclassification is only a small step toward helping them. Better remedies need to be

devised for these children and their families. More research is needed, not just to help differentiate runaways from throwaways, but also to create policies that help them both.

7) We recommend special attention and an increased policy focus on the problem of children who run away from institutions. The present study is the first to estimate the scope of this problem. Evidence suggests that children who run from juvenile facilities are likely to have run on multiple occasions, and are among the children at highest risk to become involved with police and the criminal justice system. This is a distinct population, and the approach to runaways from this population needs to be specialized. Task forces should be established and technical advice made available to help personnel from juvenile facilities prevent children from running away and to recover the children who do. The answer is not simply tighter reins on these children, but the creation of environments in which they want to stay.

8) We recommend new attention to the problem of children whom we classified in NISMART as missing because they were lost or injured, or for other miscellaneous reasons. NISMART has found that this group is quite large. It includes a heterogeneous mixture of children, some of whom are missing for rather benign reasons (who perhaps do not need public policy attention) and also some children who are already harmed or at high risk to be. These kinds of situations have previously been neglected by those concerned about "missing children" and, given the numbers and seriousness, this is unfortunate. It may well be inappropriate for law enforcement agencies to be the prime movers on behalf of these

children. For the most part they are not missing for reasons of crime. On the other hand, law enforcement does get called upon frequently to help locate them. Such children should perhaps be the focus of a joint effort by public health, child welfare, and law enforcement authorities.

Research Recommendations

In addition to policy recommendations, the findings of this study suggest some important research recommendations. This study has greatly increased, in some cases more than doubled, the quantity of scientific information available about abductions, runaways, throwaways, and other missing children. Yet in some ways it is just a beginning. To sustain a serious policy interest in these problems, a great deal more research will be necessary. What follows are some recommendations for future research.

1) Future incidence studies. To monitor trends, it will be necessary to conduct incidence studies in the future. Indeed, such incidence studies have been mandated by Congress. We would recommend that another such study be undertaken in 1993 at a 5-year interval from this study.

Because the methodology of the current study proved generally successful, the next study should be conducted along the lines of the present study with a few modifications. In brief, we recommend:

-- a random sample survey of households with children, similar to the current survey.

-- a police records survey of law enforcement agencies somewhat larger in scope than the present study.

-- a survey of juvenile facilities that is even more systematic in its coverage of such institutions than the present study.

-- a joint effort with subsequent National Incidence Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect to study abandoned and throwaway children.

2) Household survey. As the current study has shown, we believe a random sample survey of households with a total of 20,000 children can yield sufficiently precise estimates for Broad Scope family abductions, runaways, throwaways, and lost, injured, or otherwise missing. Whether Legal Definition Non-Family Abductions can be estimated with a reasonably sized household survey is still an open question. It is possible, given the yield of cases in the present study, that a survey 50 percent larger (in other words, involving the experiences of 30,000 children) could have provided a reliable estimate. Another reason for a somewhat larger survey would be to improve the estimates for Policy Focal cases, particularly in the Throwaway and Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing categories, where confidence intervals were uncomfortably large.

A household survey 5 years hence should also have as its objective the detection of changes in the rates of these various problems, and an increase in size might be dictated by how much of a change in which of the problems we would want to detect. A survey larger than 20,000 might be necessitated by the need for detecting differences or making a more sensitive analysis of risk factors. Future surveys should be easier and more efficient in

many respects, because of the experience of this one. This survey has crafted a survey instrument, much of which can be used again. Its estimates will also help greatly in the design of future samples. And its experience with the network methodology clearly suggests that this approach should be omitted, saving valuable survey time and money.

3) Police records study. An expanded household survey may be able to provide an estimate for Legal Definition Non-Family Abductions. But estimates for Stereotypical Kidnappings will still require a study based on police records. A big limitation to a police record study, however, as NISMART found, is the absence and poor quality of information in the records. Perhaps the implementation of the National Incidence Based Reporting System will improve the ability of future studies to identify abductions located in these records. Certainly, any future police record study needs to be more comprehensive than the current one. It should attempt to review sexual offense files in all agencies and perhaps even other crime files. This is not a simple modification, however, because these offense files are large, heterogenous, dispersed, and organized very differently in different jurisdictions. Some careful planning and pretesting needs to be done to insure a successful design for such a modification with adequate resources to do the job. Moreover, pilot studies should also be done to determine which crime file categories should also be reviewed in some or all agencies, and what the cost and yield would be. Consideration should also be given to expanding the police records study to determine how many of the other kinds of

episodes such as family abduction, runaways, throwaways, and lost, injured, or otherwise missing are known to police. This could provide a cross-validation of figures from a household survey, since the household study does ask survey respondents whether they contacted the police.

4) Juvenile facilities study. The present study has clearly proven the need to count runaways from juvenile residential facilities in addition to households. However, the methodology for doing this could be greatly refined. The preferred approach would be to sample institutions from a complete list of all eligible facilities, rather than to rely on nominations from a household sample as in the present study. One way to do this would be to choose a random sample of counties and send enumerators to each county to draw up a list of eligible facilities, from which the sample would be drawn. Another possibility is to try to build up a "bank" of facilities identified in successive series of random-digit dialed telephone surveys dialing huge volumes of randomly generated numbers in searches for households rather than institutions. Moreover, in either case, a key step in any future effort to combine household and juvenile facility estimates is to determine how many children ran from both settings. Methodology should be developed for refining the estimate of this number.

5) Utilizing child abuse studies. The problem of throwaways overlaps the concept of child abuse and neglect, a fact that can be better utilized for research purposes. Thus, any effort to study the incidence of throwaways must consider common endeavors with agencies trying to measure the incidence of child abuse and

neglect. The National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN) is considering how to design a system for monitoring the national incidence on an ongoing basis. In the past, that system has relied on collating data collected annually by individual States, and supplementing this with a national survey of community agencies conducted every 5 years (the NIS). The Office of Juvenile Justice should consider trying to develop interagency agreements with NCCAN about data collection. Various minor mechanisms in the design of these child abuse studies--such as some categories clearly matching definitions used by OJJDP--could facilitate greatly the ability to use these data to estimate the incidence of throwaways and abandoned children in the future. By the same token, data from NISMART and similar future studies would be useful to supplement or validate the incidence of certain kinds of child abuse.

6) Methodological studies. The validity of all these studies can be tested and improved with a variety of validation studies that will need to be undertaken to build the credibility of the incidence estimates.

For the household survey, two types of validation studies are important: multiple perspective studies and reverse records checks. The Returned Runaway study in the present design is a multiple-perspective study, which has improved our understanding of runaway estimates. Such studies need to be completed in the future for throwaway, family abduction, and lost, injured, or otherwise missing episodes. They are particularly important in the family abduction category where the perspectives of both parties to the conflict--e.g., custodial and noncustodial parent--need to be

compared. They are also crucial in the study of throwaways, where children tend to allege more "throwing away" behavior than is admitted to by the caretakers.

In reverse record check studies, households with episodes known through an independent source (for example, police department, runaway shelter, child protective agency, or hospital records) need to be surveyed using the telephone methodology and standard screening questions. In this way, we can begin to assess whether and to what extent respondents forget, fail to disclose, change details, and mistake the date of occurrence, all of which can distort estimates. Some work has already been done along these lines,³ but such work can be improved and extended using the refined instrument and definitions developed in the course of NISMART.

7) New and revised data collection systems. In addition to future incidence studies, the Department of Justice should consider ongoing data collection systems that could provide more information about the problems of concern in this report.

For example, we strongly recommend that the FBI supplemental homicide data add a circumstance code for abduction. This minor change would greatly facilitate the future calculation of the number of stranger abduction homicides of children.

The National Crime Survey could add a question about abductions to their questions about crime victimization. Although

³ Lavrakas, P.J., & Rosenbaum, S.M. (1986, December). Pilot-testing telephone survey methods for measuring the incidence of missing children and associated attitudes, perceptions and experiences. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Survey Laboratory.

the NCS only covers children aged 12 to 17, the study and monitoring of abduction in this important segment of the child population would be greatly improved.

Consideration should also be given to establishing a national "sentinel" system, based in law enforcement agencies. If, in a scientifically selected sample of agencies, monthly or yearly data were gathered using dispatch and phone reports (rather than relying on files for investigations) about the number of family abductions, non-family abductions, runaways, throwaways, and lost, injured, or otherwise missing children reported to those agencies, it would be possible to monitor national trends on a more regular basis.

Conclusion

Large numbers of America's children are in crisis. That is the message of NISMART and of numerous other recent reports on children's health, welfare, and security. For background, consider these kinds of numbers. Over a million children experience a parental divorce every year.⁴ Over a million and a half are identified as abused or neglected every year.⁵ Three million are estimated to be severely emotionally disturbed.⁶ Over 12 million live in poverty.⁷ Five hundred thousand are malnourished.⁸ One

⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1986). Advance report of final divorce statistics, 1984. Monthly Vital Statistics Report, 35(6), 1-16.

⁵ Sedlak, A. (1988). Study findings: Study of national incidence and prevalence of child abuse and neglect: 1988. Washington, DC: Department of Health and Human Services.

⁶ Children's Defense Fund (CDF) (1989). A vision for America's future. Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

hundred and eighty-eight thousand are infected with gonorrhea, and between 10 and 20,000 with the AIDS virus.⁹

The numbers from the present study add their dismal toll to this already considerable body count:

450,700 Broad Scope and 133,500 Policy Focal Runaways.

127,100 Broad Scope and 59,200 Policy Focal Throwaways.

354,100 Broad Scope and 163,200 Policy Focal Family Abductions.

3,200 to 4,600 Legal Definition Abductions and 200 to 300 Stereotypical Kidnappings.

438,200 Broad Scope and 139,100 Policy Focal Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing Children.

The children enumerated in this study have been highlighted because of circumstances that put them at risk of separation from their caretakers. But these are not new children and new problems. We have seen these children before in the figures on other problems. We are glancing now at a different part of their crisis, but it is not a new crisis or their entire crisis.

For example, many of the throwaways and runaways we counted here are among the million and more children reported each year for child abuse and neglect. These same runaways and throwaways also appear in counts of delinquent youth, school dropouts, school failures, and youth with drug problems, just to name a few.

The family-abducted children have also been counted in various ways before. Many have been among the 1 million children a year

⁹ Hughes, D., Johnson, K., Rosenbaum, S., & Liu, J. (1989). The health of America's children. Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund.

who experience a parental divorce.¹⁰ Most are among the 15 million children living in single-parent families.¹¹ They have been through family conflict, changes of residence, and divorce-induced economic and social strains.

The non-family abducted children, too, are part of other statistics. They are part of the 1.2 million youthful victims of violent crime every year.¹² They are among the 26,000 raped and 2,000 murdered children.¹³

Seeing the new numbers with the old numbers and the issues of this study in the light of the issues of other studies should also serve to emphasize three things. First, the solution to these problems cannot come about through a narrow focus. We cannot, for example, solve the runaway problem by simply analyzing the process of running away. To solve the runaway problem, we have also to confront the problems of child abuse, family conflict, drugs, and school failure, just to name four major components. Similarly, we cannot solve the problem of non-family abduction simply by studying that particular crime. To solve the non-family abduction problem, we have to confront the sources of violent crime, the motives for child sexual assault, and so forth. To solve the family abduction problem, we have to confront divorce, custody, child support, and the sensitivity of the judicial system to the needs of children and

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, op. cit.

¹¹ Bureau of the Census (1989). Statistical abstract of the United States: 1989 (109th Ed.). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

¹² Flanagan, T., & Jamieson, K. (Eds.) (1988). Sourcebook of criminal justice statistics - 1987. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

¹³ Ibid.

parents. It is not the role of this study to recommend solutions to the problems of abduction, runaways, throwaways, and missing children. But it is clear that such solutions have to come in a broad social context.

Second, mapping out the broad social context should remind us that advocates for children are fundamentally allies, not adversaries. More than many other child advocacy issues in recent years, the "missing children" problem has divided child advocates. Some championed it as a bold new challenge, while others bitterly opposed it. But the "missing children" problems (more than one as we see them) sit at the crossroads of many other child welfare concerns. Advocates can only imagine that they are adversaries if they choose to ignore this broader context. All advocates must be clearly united in the need to improve the quality of parenting, the economic and health status of children, the quality of education, and to bring down the toll of violence that victimizes everyone but especially children. Such important changes would certainly alleviate the crisis of missing children along with a whole host of other child-related crises.

Finally, putting the numbers from this study together with other indicators of child welfare should tell us something about how to react. These numbers tell us, of course, that we are dealing with massive social problems. There are in America an appallingly large number of children facing multiple and compounded difficulties. But the numbers also counsel us against hysteria. Hysteria has sometimes afflicted the concern about missing children, along with the conviction that it was the only or the

most serious or the most rapidly deepening crisis affecting American children. Hysteria can lead to short-sighted social policy decisions. Sadly, we have seen numbers of this magnitude before to describe these and other related child welfare problems. We also know from that experience that precipitous action and short-sighted mobilizations can be counterproductive.

Large numbers of children, for a variety of reasons, are missing or not where they are supposed to be. This study has documented some of the dimensions of these problems, and some of the suffering and trauma that they inflict. Our society seems poised to do something about these problems.

But as we proceed, we need to keep in mind our ultimate goal. Finding children, bringing them back to where they belong is only a means; it cannot be taken as an end in itself. Their missingness or absence from home is not necessarily their most important problem. Focusing on it exclusively can blind us to their real needs. Ultimately what is most important is healing these children and fostering their healthy development. To achieve this, we have to be conscious of the quality of the environment to which we restore them. This environment needs to include families where there is love, security, and material resources, and communities where there is safety, respect, and meaningful educational and employment opportunities. Without these things, bringing them back will have been in vain.

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Appendix I

ESTIMATED INCIDENCE OF COUNTABLE CHILDREN IN DIFFERENT MISSING
CHILDREN CATEGORIES

Appendix I. Estimated Incidence of Countable Children in Different Missing Children Categories.

Category	Estimate ^a	S.D. ^b	95% Confidence Interval ^c		C.V. (%) ^d
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
HOUSEHOLD SURVEY:					
Family Abduction					
- Broad Scope	354,100	36,817	281,900	426,200	10.4
- Policy Focal	163,200	28,767	106,800	219,600	17.6
- Attempts	44,900	13,977	17,500	72,300	31.2
Non-Family Abduction					
- Attempts	114,600	17,734	79,900	149,400	15.5
Runaway					
- Broad Scope	446,700	63,680	321,900	571,500	14.3
- Policy Focal	129,500	33,435	64,000	195,100	25.8
- Gestures	173,700	35,836	103,500	244,000	20.6
Thrownaway					
- Broad Scope	112,600	27,411	58,900	166,300	24.3
- Policy Focal	44,700	20,274	4,900	84,400	45.4
Lost or Other-wise Missing					
- Broad Scope	438,200	66,116	308,600	567,800	15.1
- Policy Focal	139,100	57,972	25,500	252,700	41.7

COMMUNITY PROFESSIONALS STUDY:					
Thrownaway					
- Policy Focal	14,500	6,376	2,000	27,000	44.0

POLICE RECORDS STUDY:					
Non-Family Abduction ^e					
- Legal Abductions	1,400	400	500	2,200	32.4
- Stereotypical Kidnappings	200	107	0	400	45.7

JUVENILE FACILITIES STUDY:					
Runaway					
- Policy Focal	12,800	882	11,100	14,600	7.0

- a The estimate is the midpoint of the confidence interval. Estimates and confidence intervals are all rounded to the nearest hundred.
- b "S.D." is the standard deviation of the estimate. It is a measure of the amount of variation there is around our midpoint estimate.
- c We are 95 percent certain that our midpoint estimate falls within the confidence interval for each category.
- d The coefficient of variation is the standard deviation expressed as a percentage of the midpoint estimate. The higher the "C.V." is, the wider the confidence interval will be.
- e These estimates are without the sexual assault file multiplier taken from the four county sample, for which we have no way to calculate a confidence interval.

Appendix II

A GUIDE TO DEFINITIONS
USED BY THE NATIONAL INCIDENCE STUDIES
OF MISSING, ABDUCTED, RUNAWAY, AND THROWAWAY CHILDREN

David Finkelhor, Ph.D.

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The issue of "missing children" has been beset by definitional problems. For example, when many people hear the term "missing children," they mistakenly assume it is synonymous with "children who have been abducted." For another example, some people consider a child who was dragged into the bushes, sexually assaulted and released, a child who has been "abducted"; others do not. These confusions and disagreements have impeded rational discussion of the problem.

As part of the effort to estimate the scope of the problem, researchers connected to the National Incidence Studies were obliged to develop comprehensive and objective definitions. Nothing can be counted unless it is clearly defined. The researchers drew on the knowledge of 34 experts in various fields and, after a three-stage process of drafting and consultation, came up with a set of definitions to be used in the study.

What follows is a brief outline of the definitions. A longer, more detailed paper discussing the definitions is also available.

Non-Family Abduction

The term "non-family abduction" is an expansion of the classic concept of stranger abduction. It includes, besides strangers, other known individuals, such as babysitters or neighbors, who might abduct a child.

The study recognized that there were two co-existing ideas about what an abduction is, a fact that has often created misunderstanding in discussing the scope of the problem. There is a broad definition of abduction, found in criminal statutes, that considers an abduction to be any forced movement or detention. Such abductions occur in the course of many crimes, such as rape, when a person is taken somewhere, for example,

into an alley or car, and then assaulted. On the other hand, there is a more limited meaning to abduction, held by the media and public at large, that entails lengthy detainment and is typified by notorious cases such as the Lindbergh baby and Patty Hearst. We have dealt with this by defining two types of non-family abduction: Legal Definition Abductions and Stereotypical Kidnappings.

Under the Legal Definition Abduction¹ type, a Non-Family Abduction can occur in any one of three ways: 1) coerced taking 2) detainment or 3) luring.

Coerced Taking

Coerced taking in this definition means a child is taken by force or threat into a vehicle, into a building, or a substantial distance (which we set at 20 feet, a distance roughly consistent with rule established in a California court case). This would include, for example, a child dragged into a car or an alley and sexually assaulted. The taking must be without lawful authority or the permission of a parent or guardian.

Detainment

When a child is unlawfully detained by force or threat for a "substantial period" in a place of isolation, an abduction also occurs. We set substantial period at 1 hour from the time the force or threat is invoked. A place of isolation refers to any area which the child is not able to leave on his or her own and from which s/he had no opportunity to appeal for help or assistance. Thus, a situation where an individual

¹The term legal does not refer to any specific State statute that defines abduction in these terms. The concept is drawn from an amalgam of criminal laws.

enters a school and holds students hostage for an hour or more would be included under this definition.

Luring

There are abductions where children go voluntarily with a perpetrator or are so young that voluntariness is immaterial. One type of abduction by lure recognized by these definitions is where the perpetrator had the intent at the time of the lure to physically or sexually assault the child. A perpetrator who used candy or a pet to draw a child into a car would thus be committing an abduction. Note how this definition draws a line between two types of "date rape" situations, where a girl goes off with a boy who later sexually assaults her. If the date had the intent to assault the girl when he left with her, as might be indicated by efforts to isolate her, then this would be an abduction. If the assault was more spontaneous, then no abduction occurred.

A second type of abduction by lure is where the child goes voluntarily but where the intent of the perpetrator is to conceal the child, keep the child, or extort ransom. This portion of the definition would cover cases where, for example, a babysitter brings a young child into her own home to keep as her own or where an angry perpetrator hides a child to retaliate against the parents of the child. Note that we wanted to exclude situations like the case of a 17-year-old girl who goes off, against her parents' wishes to live in another State with a 23-year-old man whom she has been dating. The parents in such cases often claim the man lured and abducted their child, but there seems to be too large an element of consensual participation by the child. Thus, an abduction by lure of the second type in this definition can occur only to children 14 or younger or who are mentally incompetent. The assumption is that

mentally competent children 15 or older cannot be ransomed or concealed without force or threat unless there is substantial complicity of the child. Of course, if there is force or threat, this would be abduction no matter what the age.

Stereotypical Kidnappings

Stereotypical Kidnapping is the kind of abduction labeled in media accounts as child kidnapping or child stealing. As defined here, it requires that, in addition to meeting the legal definitional criteria just outlined, the child also has to be removed and/or detained overnight or be killed or be transported 50 miles or more from the scene of the abduction. The criteria for a Stereotypical Kidnapping are also met if the child is ransomed or if the perpetrator expresses an intention to keep the child. These characteristics highlight abductions where there is notable effort to separate and keep a child from his/her environment. It also signals that the abduction was a substantial crime additional to any sexual assault that may have been the primary intent. The other distinction between Stereotypical Kidnapping and Legal Definition Abduction is that Stereotypical Kidnapping is restricted to true strangers, and does not include acquaintances, neighbors, people in authority.

Finally, note that a child does not have to be missing to his/her parents or guardians in order to have been abducted. If a child is taken, assaulted and released on the way home from school a Legal Definition Abduction occurred, even though the child was never missed by her parents. Although being missed is not required by the Stereotypical Kidnapping either, we believe that in most instances, except where the child is taken

and murdered in rather short order, the child will have been missed by her parents.

In the definitions that follow, a distinction has been made between what we have termed, "Broad Scope" episodes and "Policy Focal" episodes. This distinction was motivated by the observation that police and public officials often have a need for a different, more stringent kind of definition than one that family members might have employed. There were only certain kinds of serious family abductions, runaways, throwaways, etc., in which police took an interest. "Policy Focal" refers to the kinds of cases that have generally been of concern to these officials because of the high risk of harm or the need for intervention. However, this distinction is not made in the case of Non-Family Abduction. All Non-Family Abductions, both Legal Definition Abduction and Stereotypical Kidnapping, are Policy Focal, in the sense that they are a kind of episode of concern to police and policymakers.

Family Abduction

Family abductions are primarily abductions perpetrated by spouses and ex-spouses in the course of divorce and custody disputes. But they also include abductions perpetrated by other family members (for example, grandparents who disapprove of how their grandchildren are being raised) or by agents of family members (attorneys or private detectives carrying out the wishes of a noncustodial parent). Because a boyfriend or the unmarried father of a child sometimes abducts a child, we are also counting anyone with a romantic involvement with a parent as a "family member."

The definition we are using here recognizes that there are two co-existing meanings to Family Abduction. There is a broad meaning that is

codified in legal statutes in many States that defines abduction as any taking of a child in violation of custody rights. There is also a narrower meaning that is restricted to the serious kinds of cases of interest to police and public officials, where a perpetrator tries to conceal a child and deprive the victimized parent of all contact with the child. Thus, we have defined a Broad Scope Family Abduction and a Policy Focal Family Abduction.

Broad Scope Family Abduction

Two kinds of family abductions are covered under the Broad Scope definition. The first involves the taking of a child in violation of a custody decree or agreement. This may be for an extra day or extra weekend. This would cover a noncustodial father who in unauthorized circumstances, picks up a child from school and takes the child, even if he only keeps the child for a night.

Sometimes a parent abducts a child in the early stages of a separation before there is a decree, and sometimes couples separate without ever getting formal decrees. Thus, the violation specified in the definition does not need to be only of a decree but can also be of an informal agreement, which means any mutual understanding or normal practice that has been taken as the standard in the past.

The second kind of Family Abduction is the "refusal to return or give over" a child in violation of a custody agreement or decree and where the child is away in violation at least overnight. This would cover the situation of a noncustodial father who refuses to bring a child back after the appointed weekend or vacation, and keeps the child an extra day or more. In this kind of family abduction a custodial parent may also be a perpetrator. Thus, if the noncustodial father has rights to the child

for the weekend, and the custodial mother refuses to give over the child, this is an abduction as well.

Policy Focal

Policy Focal highlights those serious cases of primary interest to policymakers and police. A Broad Scope case becomes Policy Focal if any one of three additional elements are involved:

- a) an attempt is made to conceal the taking or the whereabouts of the child or to prevent contact; or
- b) the child is transported from the State with the intent of making it more difficult to contact or recover the child; or
- c) the perpetrator has the apparent intent to prevent contact with the child on an indefinite basis or to permanently affect custodial privileges.

Policy Focal cases would be situations, for example, where a noncustodial father takes a child from Pennsylvania and goes to Ohio, beyond the jurisdiction of the current custody decree; or, for example, a mother who moves and never informs the father of their new address.

The Policy Focal Family Abduction makes an important distinction among episodes according to age in order to exclude instances in custody disputes where an older child wants to go live with a noncustodial parent, and so conspires or cooperates to violate a decree or custodial arrangement. For children age 15 or older, Policy Focal cases require that there be some evidence of force or threat used to take or detain the child. Take, for example, the 15-year-old boy who wants to live with his father and since the mother won't allow it, the father conspires to have the child picked up and taken to California. This would not be a Policy Focal family abduction. If the father threatened the boy to make him stay

when he wanted to leave, however, the case would then be counted as Policy Focal.

Runaways

Running away covers a wide gamut of behaviors from the child who storms out in anger, walks around the block, and returns in an hour, to the child who leaves town for a religious cult and is never heard from again. We have tried to distinguish with our definitions three types of distinct phenomena: 1) minor episodes that we call "Runaway Gestures," which are not included in the national incidence count; 2) episodes lasting at least 1 night, which we call "Broad Scope Runaways"; and 3) episodes where a child is in jeopardy because of not having a place to stay, which we call "Policy Focal Runaways."

In most people's minds, running away is defined by a child leaving home without parental permission and staying away some length of time. Our definition includes this concept, but adds another one as well. When children are already away with permission, but refuse or choose not to come home when they are supposed to, this is also a form of running away. Thus, if a child has permission to go to the rock concert on Friday, and instead of coming home Friday night as expected, he decides not to come home all weekend, this must be considered a runaway just as surely as the child who is prohibited from going to the rock concert but leaves anyway to go and stays away the weekend. The one form of running away we call "leaving" and the other "staying away."

Our "Broad Scope Runaway" takes as its minimum the idea that the child has to leave or stay away without permission at least overnight. Being away overnight denotes a certain level of seriousness and has been used as a definitional marker in prior research. If a child only stays

away a few hours, even if he or she leaves a "runaway note," we called this a "Runaway Gesture," and we did not include it in the incidence figures for Runaways. But even some of the overnight cases we deemed as not quite serious enough for the "Broad Scope Runaway." Among older adolescents in contemporary America, there is a relatively common form of rebellion which entails going to a party or a concert and "forgetting to come back" until the next morning. Thus, for children 15 years or older, if they were out initially with permission but stayed overnight when they weren't supposed to, it was defined only as a "Runaway Gesture." A 2-night period of staying away, after being out with permission, was required before such an older adolescent was counted under Broad Scope Runaway. For a child 14 or younger, a single night of staying away was counted.

Policy Focal Runaway delineates a more serious form of the problem. There is a widespread recognition among police, if not among parents, that a large portion of runaways are not really children in jeopardy. Prior research shows that half or more of runaways run away to the homes of friends or relatives. Thus, the parents forbid a child to go out with her boyfriend, so she runs and spends the night at his home anyway. This seems quite different from the situations of children who run and are out in the street or without a place to stay. Police have concentrated their efforts on, and have also sought to have runaways defined in reference to, this at-risk group.

In recognition of this distinction, the Policy Focal Runaways are defined as those episodes where, in addition to meeting Broad Scope criteria, the child is without a familiar and secure place to stay. Thus, a child who runs away and stays at a friend's house, or with a relative, even for several nights, would be considered Broad Scope, but not Policy

Focal. By contrast, a child who runs away for the same period and stays for some of the time in a car or at a motel or even in a runaway shelter would be Policy Focal.

Throwaways

Much previous public policy and research has failed to distinguish between runaways and throwaways. But advocates for homeless children have justifiably complained that the concept and stereotype of the runaway have too readily made it appear as though the child is out of the home "voluntarily" or because he/she was rebellious or unruly. Unfortunately, many out-of-home children have been kicked out or abandoned by their parents. This study and this set of definitions place a great emphasis on delineating a distinct group of children who are throwaways.

There are four types of throwaway situations that are recognized and distinguished by these definitions. 1) There is the stereotypical instance of a child who is told by a parent or guardian to leave the house. 2) Then there is the child who is away for some reason--for example, visiting relatives or at school--and who is not allowed back into the home. 3) There are children who are abandoned. These range from the newborn who is left on the doorstep of a stranger's home, to the teenager who comes home to find that his family has moved and left no forwarding address. 4) Finally, there are some episodes that are initially runaway situations, but because of parental indifference essentially become throwaways. If a child runs away, but the parents make no effort whatsoever to recover the child or state baldly that they don't care whether the child stays or returns, this represents an abdication of parental responsibility and thus the child becomes a throwaway.

The definitions recognize one possibly mitigating element in these forms of parental rejection. If parents provide some adequate alternative

care, then the rejection is not defined as a throwaway. Thus, if a child is kicked out of the house and told to spend the night at her grandparents, this is not counted as a throwaway. If a parent abandons a child to her sister, this is not counted as a throwaway. If, as sometimes happens, a husband kicks out both his wife and child, and the wife can be reasonably expected to care for the child, then this also is not a throwaway.

As in the case of runaways, the throwaway definition also has a 1-night minimum. This excludes cases of parental rejection that last only a few hours, such as the child who is punished for talking back to his mother by being kicked out of the house for the afternoon.

Also, as in the runaway case, the definition distinguishes a more serious Policy Focal form of throwaway in contrast to the Broad Scope definition. Like runaways, throwaways fall into jeopardy primarily when they do not have a safe place to stay. Thus the Policy Focal Throwaway episodes are differentiated by the child's not having a safe and secure place to stay. A child who is kicked out and goes to spend the night at a friend's house would be considered a Broad Scope, but not Policy Focal Throwaway. A child who is kicked out and ends up sleeping on the street would qualify as Policy Focal.

Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing

There are missing children who are neither abducted nor runaways nor throwaways. They include children who are lost, for example, in the woods or in crowded urban areas, who wander away from their parents in shopping malls or at airports, or who suffer accidents and fail to come home. In the controversy about missing children, these cases have been relatively neglected. Yet many are very frightening for the parents and

many are also serious from a public policy standpoint. For example, when law enforcement officers search for 3 days in the wilderness to recover a 6-year-old who wandered away from home, this occupies more manpower and media attention than most "missing child" episodes.

When children are lost or missed by their parents, the perceived seriousness of the episode is largely dependent on the age of the child. A baby missing for a matter of minutes may arouse parents' alarm. But when teenagers, by contrast, are missing for hours, many parents do not worry because they know they will eventually show up.

The definition for lost, injured, or otherwise missing children recognizes this age criterion as a central one. Thus, in order to qualify as a lost or missing child, an older teenager (age 14-17) has to be gone overnight, an 11-13 year-old must be gone 8 hours, a 7-10 year-old gone 4 hours, a 5-6 year-old gone 3 hours, a 3-4 year-old gone 2 hours. For a child from birth through 2, any disappearance qualifies, on the presumption that these children are very vulnerable. This same vulnerability applies to children with a serious physical or mental disability or with a life threatening medical condition, and their disappearance even for a short time might connote the worst. So any disappearance for such children is taken as qualifying.

The definition also recognizes as a special circumstance episodes where children disappear or are missed as a result of having suffered harm or an injury. Thus, a child of any age may be hit by a car and not come home when he is supposed to. The normal time criteria are suspended under these conditions. A child needs to be gone only 1 hour, if he is missing because he suffered harm or injury. Thus, if a teenager was in an auto accident and was missing an hour before the hospital called to report the child, he would qualify as a Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing child.

It is important to note that the duration of disappearance for any type of episode is measured from the time the parent or guardian noticed the child as "missing," not the time when the child left home. Thus, if a 10 year-old comes home from school at 6 PM, but was expected at 3 PM, she has only been "missing" for 3 hours even though she may have been gone since 9 AM. This episode does not meet the 4 hour missing time requirement for 10 year-olds.

As in other kinds of episodes, we believed there was a need to differentiate cases that are of serious concern to authorities in addition to being of concern to the parents who miss the child. So Policy Focal episodes are those where the police has been called to assist in locating the child. Thus, if two 9 year-old boys decide to hike to the lake, lose their way in the woods and return 5 hours after they were expected, this episode would only be Policy Focal if their parents, or someone, called the police to help assist in locating the boys. Otherwise, it would be Broad Scope only. The calling of the police delineates cases where parents are more seriously alarmed as well as cases that end up involving some action by public officials.

Missing children

A missing child would appear to be a child whose parents or guardians do not know where he/she is. Such a definition may seem self-evident, but it is not.

For example, are all abducted children truly "missing"? What if a stranger drags a child into a car, drives to a hidden location, rapes the child, and then releases her, and the child arrives home before parents notice that anything is amiss. This child has been abducted under the Legal Definition Abduction form of Non-Family Abduction, but the child was

never "missing" in the sense of parents not knowing the child's whereabouts. Similarly, some family abducted children are not truly missing. The noncustodial father may take the child across the State lines to his home in Virginia and refuse to return the child. The mother knows where the child is, but cannot recover him. This child would meet the Policy Focal definition of Family Abduction, but would not be "missing." Unfortunately, abduction has for some people come to mean "missing," but this is a mistaken use. Some people refer to all abducted children, runaway children, and throwaway children as "missing children," but this is also a misnomer. Under these definitions, a child is only missing when parents actually do not know where the child is. The only category where all the children are literally missing is the Lost and Otherwise Missing category.

One problem this creates is that some term is still needed to apply to all the categories of children covered by this study. Up until now they have been called "missing children." But it sows confusion to call them "missing children" if some of them are not truly missing. One resolution we propose is to refer to all categories the expanded term "missing and displaced" children. Displaced means "not where the child is expected or supposed to be." A child who is abducted for a short period of time may never be missing, but she is certainly displaced. A child who is in the unlawful possession of a noncustodial parent may not be missing, but is displaced. The phrase "missing and displaced" children covers most of the children misidentified by the term "missing."

Conclusion

These definitions have been developed in an effort to further the understanding of several important social problems and to aid in trying to estimate the incidence of their occurrence. In order to make sense of

the incidence estimates, some familiarity with the definitions is required. However, these definitions are also the beginning of a discussion, not the end. Definitions can never be perfect. They can never anticipate all possible situations. Cases will be found that challenge their boundaries. One of the main rewards of discussing definitions, however, is that it fosters a deeper understanding. We welcome efforts to further this understanding by adding to and refining the definitions we offer here.

OTHER REPORTS FROM NISMART
(5/15/90)

Report on Definitions

Report on Household Survey Methodology

Report on Police Records Study Methodology*

Report on Returned Runaway Survey Methodology*

Report on Juvenile Facilities Study Methodology*

Report on Community Professionals Study Methodology*

Report on FBI Data Reanalysis Methodology*

*In preparation