

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Glasgow
Unit of Assessment: 17A – Geography, Environmental Studies and Archaeology: Geography
Title of case study: Using ‘missing people narratives’ to influence training and education for police and NGOs
1. Summary of the impact

Police data on c.350,000 UK persons annually reported as ‘missing’ reveals very little about *where they go and what happens to them*. University of Glasgow researcher Parr’s internationally unique research has resulted in outputs addressing this and which have enhanced public awareness and empathetic understanding of missing behaviour, while influencing the education and training provided to police officers in England and Scotland. The research has also provided new learning resources being used by the Missing People Charity for volunteer and staff training.

2. Underpinning research

The ESRC-funded *Geographies of Missing People* project (2011-2014) is led by Dr Hester Parr, Reader in Geography at the University of Glasgow, with co-investigators Professor Nick Fyfe (Scottish Institute of Policing Research [SIPR], University of Dundee) and Dr Penny Woolnough (Senior Research Officer for Grampian Police). A dedicated project researcher, Olivia Stevenson, appointed for the duration of the project, has been based in Glasgow. Parr devised the original idea, led the co-drafted application, co-ordinated and undertook some of the field research, and has led on academic and report publishing from the project. Attempting something never attempted before, this project recruited 45 returned missing people via a police partner database in order to hear the ‘voices’ of these individuals, creating a unique window on their missing journeys and on the detail of where, how and why that went missing. The accounts of families of missing people were also engaged, as too was evidence of current police search techniques and missing people profiling.

Central to this project was Parr’s development of a creative narrative impact strategy (Parr and Stevenson, forthcoming), seeking to produce composite ‘stories’ told by missing people, and analysing key lessons to be learned from these stories. These outputs have been intended as educational and capacity-building resources for relevant user groups: police officers, families and missing people, the Missing People Charity (NGO) and the general public. Parr also contributed these and other materials as the research basis of training days and seminars for these groups. Fyfe and Woolnough of SIPR provided police contacts and knowledge networks and physically co-delivered training. The research-led report and paper writing and creative impact approach is the core University of Glasgow contribution claimed here, one that continues to influence knowledge exchange networks for missing people in the UK, Europe and the US.

Social geographies of mental health

Previous research by Parr has investigated the relationship between mental health and place by focusing on how ‘mentally ill identities’ are defined and created by reference to a diversity of physical and virtual spaces. She has sought to envision how the person with mental health problems may be transformed from stigmatised ‘outsider’ to nuanced and networked social citizen, the core argument in her 2008 book *Mental Health and Social Space*. Parr’s approach centres diverse collections of voices and experiences which are consistently neglected or marginalised. Her participative research engages with the individual lived reality of mental illness but contributes to debates about public and population mental health and policing (Parr and Fyfe, 2013). It is evident that many people who go ‘missing’ have mental health problems, and hence there is a direct link here through to the research profiled in this case study.

Creative research methods and academic-community collaboration

Parr’s research has been a sustained attempt to make research inclusive for people with mental health problems whose lives may be very much outside of the usual remit/reach of academia. Her research practices underlying the above contributions have always been sensitive and innovative, pushing boundaries of methodological norms within the context of robust ethical argument. One of the first geographers to publish on the process of ‘emotional interview’ with vulnerable

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respondents, Parr has made numerous innovations in methodological practices and forms of writing that reach out to non-verbal subjects or to people who find standard 'research talk' very difficult. Walking, (co-)writing, digging, body-work, film-making and story-telling have all comprised ways to communicate with, and thereby to co-research, the lives of often neglected others. The creative methods articulated in the *Geographies of Missing People* project used verbatim interview transcripts in 'storying' missing people's narratives, an approach maximising public exposure to the research and making it easier for user groups to access the key messages that missing people convey about their difficult and complex movements (Parr, 2013).

3. References to the research

(quality assurance: all outputs listed here are in reputable refereed academic journals or are books/chapters published by major publishers.)

- Parr H (2008) *Mental Health and Social Space: Towards Inclusionary Geographies?* RGS-IBG Book Series, Blackwell Publishing: London ISBN 9781405168922 (**Parr**² in REF2)
- Parr, H. and Davidson, J. (2011) Psychic life, in Del Casino, V., Thomas, M., Panelli, R. and Cloke, P. (eds.) *A Companion to Social Geography* (Blackwell, Chichester, UK), pp. 275-292. ISBN 9781405189774 ([link](#))
- Parr H (2013) Sophie's story: writing missing journeys. Forthcoming in *Cultural Geographies*, already available on-line [DOI: [10.1177/1474474013510111](https://doi.org/10.1177/1474474013510111)]
- Parr H and Fyfe N (2013) Missing geographies. *Progress in Human Geography*, 37: 615-638 [DOI: [10.1177/0309132512465919](https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132512465919)] (**Parr**¹ in REF2)
- Parr, H. and Stevenson, O. (2013) *Missing People, Missing Voices: Stories of Missing Experience* (University of Glasgow). [[PDF link](#) and available from HEI]
- Stevenson, O, Parr, H, Woolnough P and Fyfe, N (2013) *Geographies of Missing People: Processes, Experiences, Responses* (University of Glasgow) [[PDF link](#) and available from HEI] ISBN: 9780852619360

Research grant income supporting the research

2011-2014, ESRC "Geographies of Missing People", £420,486.

4. Details of the impact**Influencing the education and training provided to police officers**

Parr's writing has been central to the research team's presentations at 9 major national UK police Knowledge Exchange events since 2010, including the Society of Evidence Based Policing and the US Federal Bureau of Investigation National Academy Associates, with attendance ranging from 10 to 200 police officers across the events. The team have created *new* Knowledge Exchange networks in the EU via a project event in Brussels, led by Parr and administered by the SIPR secretary (May 2013; 30 attendees from 5 countries), and 2 presentations in Washington, US (April 2013; 200 attendees) held as part of an International Police and Justice Evidence Based Network with SIPR. Parr designed, wrote and led the major launch of the project findings and missing stories at the *first* International Conference of Missing People, held in June 2013 (150 delegates), following which the UK Association of Chief Police Officers Lead for Missing Persons observed (in a subsequent e-mail to Parr) that:

I believe the work being done to really understand what happens when people go missing is crucial to improving the police response. Listening to a presentation on the findings so far made a huge impact on me and gave me a greater insight into the psyche of those who go missing than anything I had experienced in the past 30 years. This work will provide a sound foundation for the future development of police tactics and indeed the way in which the public in general can better understand those who go missing.

In July 2013, Parr contributed research-led core materials and data to a scenario-based resource workshop delivered by team members Fyfe and Woolnough to the UK National Search Centre training for 30 specialist search officers in Bramshill and the UK Missing People Bureau. The

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quotes below represent the responses on signed evaluation sheets when various ranked officers were asked how they would use the materials in practice after training:

Police Tactical Support Group Officer: *to assist officers in initial phase of inquiry, and influence search areas.*

PolSA (specialist Police Search Advisor): *good for potentially planning search areas.*

Response Inspector: *to explain why I wanted to search a specific location and to support a search strategy.*

Police Search Advisor: *training initial responders for missing persons, people who respond to incidents and speak to missing persons on return.*

Inspector: *for an awareness of family needs and why I should value their input.*

Intelligence officer: *to think more about the person and their habits, rather than that they are 25, mental health issues etc.*

Police Advisor (Foreign and Commonwealth Office): *increased knowledge to assist in finding missing people: a very helpful day.*

Sergeant: *as information to reinforce the value of regular communication.*

Sergeant: *any indication of how a missing person works out a leaving strategy is helpful.*

Police support unit: *this is a subject all officers should have an in-depth knowledge of ... use the knowledge to think from a missing person's perspective ... on all missing persons enquiries.*

This event was followed by input to the Police Scotland's Sergeants Leadership Programme training week in late-July/early-August 2013, which generated similar evaluations, notably:

Police Scotland Officer: *it was good to hear the mispers' point of view and how and why they avoided detection. In particular, mispers have not committed a crime by being missing and I will ensure my offers treat mispers respectfully and with sympathy.*

Of the 120-page report – substantially written by Parr with Stevenson – on the research results, the Manager of the UK National Police Bureau of Missing People stated in June 2013:

Until now no research or study has been available to help explain why adults go missing. The record of experience in the following pages will help develop policy, help build prevention strategies and supporting provisions for missing people and their families. As such, this report has an immediate relevance and utility in evidence-based operational practice.

Parr has now secured new University of Glasgow Knowledge Exchange Funding to extend the long-term legacy of the project, via a contact brokered by Fyfe of SIPR, but to be delivered by Parr and Stevenson, for the UK National Police College e-learning programmes 'Missing People Module'. This module has reached 5,000 officers in the last 3 years.

Supporting the families of missing people

In June 2013, 10 stories of missing experience were made accessible via the website of the Missing People Charity as a public awareness and learning resource intended to prompt professional and public interest in the experience of being missing. Between launch on 17th June and 30th July, 2013 there were 140 downloads of stories from missingpeople.org.uk with social media alerts planned for the futures. As a representative of the Charity testified in June 2013:

These are stories that we have to hear, and we have to share. We must learn from them. We must allow these stories to affect us, to ground us, to help us empathise with adults who go missing as we seek to find and support them. And we owe this team [Parr's team] our thanks for bringing us these stories. All our current and new staff and volunteers will hear these recordings and read the transcripts, and they will bring their training to life ... And the families who we support will hear these stories, and they will read the reports, and I hope that they will feel less alone, and have greater understanding of what missing adults

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experience. And, most importantly, people who come to our charity, who are missing, have been missing, or are thinking they might go missing, will find the stories ...

Public awareness, education and recognition

The research has attracted significant press attention, both radio and print media (11 radio broadcasts, 17 print media articles and 2 web-based media platforms). Between launch on 1st July, 2012 and 30th July, 2013 the website designed by Parr has enjoyed 99,270 page views, with 5,197 unique visitors from 72 countries (UK 51%; EU 11%; US 17%). In one month June-July 2013 the launched stories on this site were played 257 times, while the full research report was downloaded 1,170 times.

In March 2013, the *Geographies of Missing People* project was awarded the 2013 Scottish Policing Award from the Scottish Government for 'Applied Policing Research'. This competitive honour was awarded from a shortlist of five selected nominees and was presented by the Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for Justice, Kenny MacAskill.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Research Manager, Missing People Charity, London. (Can particularly verify claims about impacts of the research on the work of the Charity, notably on families of missing persons, as well as commenting on the public outreach work of the project.)

Manager, UK Missing Persons Bureau Serious Organised Crime Agency, Hampshire. (Can particularly verify claims about the impacts of the research in terms of police education and training, and with respect to emergent implications for policing policy and practice in this field.)

Specialist Search Support, Police National Search Centre, College of Policing, Hampshire. (Can particularly verify claims about the impacts of the research in advancing understandings of how police officers can develop improved search protocols for missing persons.)

(Evidencing contribution to public awareness)

<http://www.geographiesofmissingpeople.org.uk/outputs/media> lists the many media impacts, including:

www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/missing-adults-hide--but-they-dont-run-far-8660467.html and

www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-22955884 and

www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/sep/16/campaign-unlock-secrets-missing-persons.