

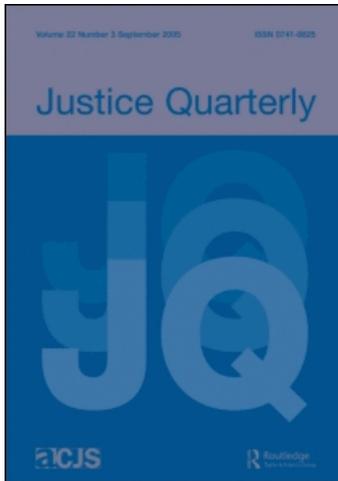
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Examining Child Abduction by Offender Type Patterns

J. Mitchell Miller, Megan Kurlycheck, J. Andrew Hansen and Kristine Wilson

Few crime topics elicit as much fear and concern as child abduction, evident, in part, by the 2006 Uniform Child Abduction Prevention Act that provides courts with guidelines to identify children at risk and supporting intervention options. Media hype and sensationalism have, in the absence of reliable offense-specific statistics, fueled both popular culture and sociolegal constructions of offender and victim stereotypes, most notably the stranger-pedophile abductor. This study examined original state police case files of all abductions that occurred in South Carolina between 1991 and 1996 ($N = 671$). Descriptive and multivariate analyses identified: (1) differences between stereotypical and actual abductions, (2) distinct abduction types, (3) offender/victim characteristics, and (4) abduction environment contexts. The results orient discussion around the responsiveness of recent policy initiatives and call attention to the need for further inquiry utilizing more comprehensive abduction data.

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Introduction

The media often speculate that the incidence of child abduction is upwardly trending and that an official response is necessary to combat this near-epidemic social problem (Fritz & Altheide, 1987; Forst & Blomquist, 1991; Goodman, 1996; Keppeler et al., 1996; Fass, 1997; Fox, 2002; Zgoba, 2004). Detailed coverage of developments in high-profile cases, such as the Danielle van Dam, Elizabeth Smart, Samantha Runnion, and Erica Pratt abductions, understandably evoke fear and anger from parents and the general public alike. Such societal reaction is not surprising as the essential narrative of child predation, especially young girls, is rooted in numerous fairy tales and myths (e.g., Hansel and Gretel, Little Red Riding Hood, and Andromeda) and provides journalists and other observers a context for addressing a complex issue involving a mix of cautionary instruction, vulnerability, sexual menace, and parental obligation unfulfilled (Boudreaux, Lord, & Etter, 2000; Shafali, 2002). However, these cases are not representative of the scientific findings regarding missing or abducted children in America and are misleading regarding the complexities that have been shown to exist (Best & Thibodeau, 1997).

While child abduction is frequently sensationalized, exaggerated, and thus misunderstood, the myth of an epidemic does little to alleviate concern at the family level and widespread conventional beliefs about abduction have developed. Foremost among these are frightful scenarios involving strangers, long distances, long durations, and life-threatening situations (Asdigian, Finkelhor, & Hotaling, 1995; Best, 1988, 1990). Concern over child abduction has effected a series of criminal justice system policy responses, most notably the Amber Alert system and, more recently, the 2006 Uniform Child Abduction Prevention Act, that, while bettering the prospects for effectively addressing the problem, raise fundamental questions concerning the measurement and empirical nature of abduction (Huttinger, 1984; Finkelhor et al., 1995; Alanen, 2007; Elrod, 2007; Hoff, 2007).

The development of theory and policy regarding child abduction requires examination beyond the media hype surrounding these rare but sensational kidnappings into the intricate complexities that characterize the phenomenon more generally. This study reviews the extant social science literature on missing and abducted children en route to examining original South Carolina state police case files of all abductions from 1991 to 1996 ($N = 671$). Leading variables associated with abduction, differences between stereotypical and actual abductions, and an abduction typology (family, acquaintance, stranger) are identified and assessed through descriptive and multivariate analyses with specific attention to offender/victim characteristics and abduction environment relative to policy initiatives.

Background

Much of the confusion over child abductions exists due to the lack of reliable statistics (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000). Although the topic of "missing children"

emerged in 1981 as a national social problem (Best & Thibodeau, 1997), there was no single reliable source of information regarding missing children in the United States prior to 1988 (Hanson, 2000). Thrownaway Children (NISMART-1) was undertaken in 1988 as a response to the 1984 Missing Children's Assistance Act (Finkelhor, Hotaling, & Sedlak, 1990) mandating the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2002) to conduct periodic national incidence studies in order to determine the number of missing children. While the study provided the best nationally representative data set on missing children, it did not provide "global figures" and left observers muddled over distinctions between run-away, abandonment, and abduction situations (Finkelhor et al., 1990; Hanson, 2000). The Second National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMART-2) sought to fill the gaps left by the first study. As no single research strategy can provide the data needed to adequately examine all missing, and abducted children (Hanson, 2000), NISMART data are considered valuable in that a multifaceted, mixed methodological approach was utilized, drawing on interviews as well as official data sources.

NISMART-1 did provide was the first national estimate of the number of children abducted by family members and although attention to juvenile kidnapping tends to focus on strangers, estimates regarding the prevalence of family abductions from this data ran as high as 95 percent of all reported cases (Tedisco & Paludi, 1996). NIBRS data, however, lower this estimate to 49-50 percent of all child abductions (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000; Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). While NISMART-1 procedures have been thought to maximize the number of family abductions (Best & Thibodeau, 1997), NISMART-2 also found that the majority of child abductions (78 percent) involved a family member perpetrator.

Regardless of which estimate is more accurate, it is apparent that the vast majority of abductions are indeed perpetrated by family members. It is understandable, then, that the bulk of attention has focused on these, often custody-related, incidents. Because the victim, situation of the offense, and ultimate case outcome relate to offender motive, examination of how characteristics differ across events and by type of perpetrator is vital to fully understand the nature of abduction. The extant literature has primarily engaged abduction as a family-stranger dichotomy, largely neglecting the "middle ground" category of acquaintance.

Research on abductions also conveys heavy family involvement, evident by well-established legal and social work literatures. Legal research has grappled with various custody issues, particularly remedies and resources to combat incidents involving child displacement specific to international marriage and the related matter of interpreting the 1980 Hague Child Abduction Convention that was developed to offset, if not remove, the legal and practical self-help advantages an abductor might gain by engaging custody disputes in venues other than a child's habitual residence (Bruch, 2004; Chiacone, Girdner, & Hoff, 2001; Collins, Powers, McCalla, Ringwalt, & Lucas, 1993). Social work research has examined how parents and friends cope with stress due to the disappearance of

children and the various means they utilize in realizing social support (Greif & Hegar, 1993, 1994; Spilman, 2006). Other research has focused on behavioral training for teaching children basic prevention skills (Johnson et al., 2005).

Child abduction research has also examined criminal justice policy and practice, particularly prevention and response. Reviews and assessments of the well-know AMBER Alert program, a voluntary partnership between law enforcement agencies, broadcasters, transportation agencies, and the wireless industry to activate urgent bulletins in serious abduction situations, have been mostly positive. The goal of an AMBER Alert is to instantly galvanize communities to assist in the safe recovery of an abducted child. Once law enforcement determines that a child has been abducted per alert criteria, law enforcement issues an AMBER Alert and notifies broadcasters and state transportation officials. The extent of alerts varies across locale and involves some combination of regular radio and television programming interruptions, flashing highway signs and, in some places, on lottery tickets, wireless devices, and the Internet. Most observers have found the program to be highly effective, but concern has been expressed over the need to better implement the program and whether this new technological approach will undermine traditional response strategies (Griffin, Miller, Hammock, Hoppe, & Rebideaux, 2007; Miller & Clinkinbeard, 2006; Zgoba, 2004).

Research has also suggested that other technocratic enhancement strategies are needed to adequately address the problem of child abductions. These include the need to factor a developmental perspective in potential child abduction cases in recognition that victim selection and the nature of events vary considerably by juvenile age (Lord, Boudreaux, & Lanning, 2001), the need to immediately enter missing children into the National Crime Information Center's (NCIC) Missing Person File per federal law, and the problem of isolating abducted from missing children cases (Hanfland, Keppel, & Weis, 1997). Below, we consider the nature of family and nonfamily abduction in more detail with consideration of significant aspects across these types of events.

Family Abductions

Estimates of family abductions in the United States were around 25,000 to 100,000 annually prior to NISMART-1 (Sedlack et al., 2002). However, NISMART-1's estimate of 354,100 overall family child abductions in 1988, including 163,200 serious abductions, suggested that this was a larger problem than previously thought (Finkelhor et al., 1990). The follow-up NISMART-2 in 1999 estimated 203,900 child victims of family abduction, including 117,200 "caretaker missing" and 56,000 "reported missing" (Sedlack et al., 2002). A defining reality of family abductions is that they differ according to perpetrator and victim characteristics (Boudreaux, Lord, & Dutra, 1999; Finkelhor et al., 1990; Sagatun & Barrett, 1990; Hegar et al., 1993). Children not living with both parents are seemingly at much higher risk, as divorce or separation can create motives for abduction by parents and other family members (Finkelhor, Hotaling, & Sedlak,

1991; Sedlack et al., 2002). Motives include fear of losing custody, unfavorable custody decisions affecting the nature of family life such as visitation conditions, suspected abuse by family member(s), and retaliation against former partners (Finkelhor et al., 1991). *US News and World Report* observed that over 350,000 children are kidnapped in divorce custody disputes each year, creating conflict both within and outside the immediate family. Accordingly, it is not surprising that grandparents accounted for 14 percent of familial abductors in 1999 (Sedlack et al., 2002). The fact that 63 percent of family abduction victims were lawfully with the perpetrator immediately prior to the incident also suggests the extent of involvement of abductors with familial and emotional ties to victims (Sedlack et al., 2002). Overall, divorce and separation increase a child's vulnerability to both family and nonfamily abductions (Tedisco & Paludi, 1996).

Regarding offender characteristics, men were the most common family abductors including noncustodial fathers and father figures (Agopian, 1981; Carmody & Plass, 2000; Finkelhor et al., 1990, 1991; Sedlack et al., 2002; Hegar & Greif, 1991). NIBRS data from 1997 estimate the rate of female abductors at 43 percent (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000) with some observers suggesting the incidence rate is equal among male and female family perpetrators (Johnston & Girdner, 2001; Johnston et al., 2001). Family-member abduction is more likely to be perpetrated by males, consistent with the observation males are much more likely to be the perpetrators of abductions.

Approximately two-thirds to three-quarters of family abductions were committed by perpetrators under age 40, with the largest number being in their 30s (Finkelhor et al., 1991; Sedlack et al., 2002). Risk analysis on the variable of race indicates that family kidnappings are more typical among White families (Agopian, 1981, 1984; Greif & Hegar, 1992, 1993; Johnston et al., 2001; Sedlack et al., 2002). A 1999 study of 550 cases of child abduction from FBI files, however, found that 43 percent of Black male abductors were family members, while only 11 percent of White male perpetrators were family (Boudreaux et al., 1999). Observations of the role of race based on NISMART findings vary (Finkelhor et al., 1990; Sedlack et al., 2002), but evidence generally suggests that family abductions are roughly proportionate across races (Carmody & Plass, 2000; Finkelhor et al., 1991; Sedlack et al., 2002; Johnston et al., 2001). It is unclear whether higher rates among White families may be due to over-representation or because the US population is primarily White.

Regarding victim characteristics, studies have shown that gender does not play a vital role in determining risk per equal incidence rates (Finkelhor et al., 1991; Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000; Hegar, 1990), although females may be more likely to abduct females and males to abduct males (Carmody & Plass, 2000). Younger children are more vulnerable, with older teens only representing a small proportion of family abduction victims (Agopian, 1984; Boudreaux et al., 1999; Finkelhor et al., 1990; Greif & Hegar, 1992; Sedlack et al., 2002) which may be explained by increased independence and mobility combined with decreased parental control (Boudreaux et al., 1999; Sedlack et al., 2002). Most

victims were between age two and 11 (Finkelhor et al., 1990; Sedlack et al., 2002) while a large percentage of victims were younger than age six (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000; Sedlack et al., 2002; Johnston et al., 2001). The youngest children may be at less risk since they require intensive care as indicated by several studies that note that risk peaks around two and a half years of age followed by a decline (Finkelhor et al., 1991; Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000; Johnston & Gardner, 2001). The three to five age group is also over-represented in recent NISMART data with 23 percent of family abducted children but only 16 percent of the overall US child population (Sedlack et al., 2002); Johnston et al. also estimate preschool-aged victims to be the most common (2001).

Regarding time and place of abductions, NIBRS findings mimic overall crime rates in that they tend to occur after noon (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000; Snyder & Sickmund, 2006), with family abductions being the least likely to take place in the early evening or at night (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000). Data show that family abductions primarily occur from the child's home (Boudreaux et al., 1999; Finkelhor et al., 1991; Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000). However, NISMART-2 established nearly equal rates of victimization from the child's home or yard as another's home or yard (Sedlack et al. 2002). Schools or daycares served as the site of abduction in only 2-7 percent of cases (Finkelhor et al., 1991; Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000; Sedlack et al., 2002).

The use of force, threats, and weapons to facilitate abduction was present in only a small minority of episodes (Finkelhor et al., 1991; Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000; Sedlack et al., 2002). Violent crimes were linked with family abductions rarely, in only 5 percent of cases with female victims and not at all with male victims (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000). The most common serious characteristics were intent to affect custodial privileges permanently and attempts to prevent contact (Finkelhor et al., 1991; Sedlack et al., 2002).

Nonfamily Abductions

NISMART data found that an estimated 3,200 to 4,600 nonfamily abductions occurred in 1988, while only 58,200 episodes were found to exist in 1999. Of these, 200-300 from 1988 and 115 from 1999 fit the narrower definition of kidnapping (Finkelhor et al., 1992, 2002). These differences may be attributed to methodological differences between the studies, as the earlier number is based on police records and may not include elements of abduction when recording other crimes such as sexual or physical assault (Finkelhor et al., 1990). Furthermore, some estimates include victim accounts, particularly for less serious cases previously uncounted using official data and records—part of the so-called "dark figure" of crime (Best & Thibodeau, 1997).

Another complication in studying nonfamily abductions is that they can be perpetrated by different types of offenders, typically classified as acquaintances or stranger. While past studies have examined this group as a whole (Finkelhor et al., 1990; Sedlak et al., 2002), recent findings suggest the need to define and

examine acquaintances (or those known to the victim) separate from strangers (Boudreaux et al., 1999; Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000; Finkelhor et al., 2002) as the following consideration of acquaintance or stranger perpetration context suggests.

Contrary to what is stereotyped in the media, the actual rates of child kidnapping by strangers and acquaintances are quite low compared to family abductors (Finkelhor et al., 1995). In NIBRS reporting jurisdictions, for example, strangers accounted for 20-24 percent and acquaintances for 27-30 percent of all child abductions (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000; Snyder & Sickmund 2006). NISMART-2 provides even lower estimates of only 10 percent stranger and 12 percent acquaintance abductors among all episodes (Finkelhor et al., 2002). Studies which examined child abduction and homicide found higher rates of non-family abduction, 53 percent stranger and 39 percent acquaintance perpetrators in a Washington state study (Boudreaux et al., 1999; Hanfland et al., 1997).

Unlike family abductions in which the motive often involves divorce or custody disputes, nonfamily abduction is more likely to have a criminal motive such as robbery or, more often, sexual assault. Overall, NISMART data for nonfamily abduction shows around half to over two-thirds of all victims reporting sexual assault (Asdigian et al., 1995; Finkelhor et al., 1990, 2002). NIBRS data also find that additional offenses during kidnappings are most common among the nonfamily type, with sexual assault most common among girls and robbery and assault most frequent for boys (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000). Data also surprisingly suggest that acquaintances are more likely than strangers to sexually assault their female victims (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000). Likewise, a 1999 study of FBI cases of child abduction found that profit was the primary motive among male high-school age victims, while sex was the foremost motive in most female high-school age abductions (Boudreaux et al., 1999).

Similar to family abduction, males are again more likely to be the perpetrator. This is most striking among stranger abductors, with up to 95 percent male perpetrators (Asdigian et al. 1995, Finkelhor & Ormrod 2000). NISMART-2 found that males compose three-quarters of the less serious and 86 percent of the more serious (i.e., cases involving physical harm) types of nonfamily abduction (Finkelhor et al., 2002). Studies on child kidnapping and murder have likewise shown that males comprise the majority of offenders (Beyer & Beasley, 2003; Boudreaux et al., 1999; Hanfland et al., 1997). Of all types of kidnappings (family, stranger, acquaintance) it appears that only acquaintance abduction is more likely to have a female perpetrator (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000).

While perpetrators of family abductions were likely to be in their 30s, 42 percent of nonfamily offenders were 20-29, with the rate slightly lower for the more serious stereotypical types (Finkelhor et al., 2002). The other age groups, 30-39, 40-49, and 50-89, accounted for 12 percent, 16 percent, and 5 percent, respectively, while teens abducted one-quarter of all nonfamily victims (Finkelhor et al., 2002). Studies on child abduction and murder found that the majority of offenders are under 30 years old (Beyer & Beasley, 2003; Boudreaux et al., 1999; Hanfland et al., 1997). When data differentiate stranger and acquaintance, the

latter involves the largest proportion of juvenile offenders (30 percent under the age of 18), while strangers were 90 percent adults—again indicating that acquaintance and stranger type of events may be very different (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000).

Similar to family abductions, the majority of non-family offenders are White, with a range from 66 to 76 percent (Beyer & Beasley, 2003; Boudreaux et al., 1999; Hanfland et al., 1997). Again, this may be more indicative of American population characteristics rather than a trend in abductions—an issue still unanswered as available NISMART and NIBRS studies do not publish data regarding race of abductors.

Turning to victimization, girls disproportionately represent between 65 and 75 percent of abduction victims (Boudreaux et al., 1999; Finkelhor et al., 2002, 1990; Hanfland et al., 1997). Estimates that differentiate between stranger and acquaintance victimization indicate this gender skew is quite similar across abduction type with 64 percent of stranger abductions and 72 percent of acquaintance abductions involving a female victim (Finkelhor & Ormrod 2000), likely attributable to the previously noted frequency of sexual assault as a motive for nonfamily abduction (Asdigian et al., 1995; Boudreaux et al., 1999; Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000; Finkelhor et al., 1990, 2002; Hanfland et al., 1997).

Nonfamily abduction victims tend to be older than family abduction victims, with the 15-17 age group most often represented overall with 59 percent of victims (Finkelhor et al., 2002). An earlier incidence study concluded that teenagers are the most common victims of nonfamily kidnapping (Finkelhor et al., 1990), supported by NIBRS data demonstrating that the risk of abduction by a stranger rises through elementary school and peaks at age 15 (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000). Other age groups are represented as follows: 22 percent ages 12-14, 12 percent ages 6-11, and 7 percent ages 0-5 (Finkelhor et al., 2002). The sex motive may be related to this age distribution, as sex crimes were found to increase dramatically through elementary school, to be the primary motive among older female victims, and were committed in 84 percent percent of cases by Caucasians, the large majority of whom are men (Boudreaux et al., 1999).

Regarding time and place of abduction, nonfamily kidnappings originate in homes or yards in only a small minority of cases, (23 percent) and the victim's home or yard represents only 5 percent of origination points, although the rate (16 percent) is higher for more serious episodes (Finkelhor et al., 2002). The most common origination point is a street, car, or other vehicle (32 percent), followed by a park or wooded area (25 percent), other public area (14 percent), and occasionally (5 percent) school or daycare (Finkelhor et al., 2002). These results are consistent with earlier studies where the majority of victims were taken from the street (Finkelhor et al., 1990). However, these findings are representative primarily of stranger abductions which occur primarily in outside locations (58 percent), while acquaintance abductions occur in or around the family residence 63 percent of the time (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000). Interestingly, initial contact occurred in over half of episodes within a quarter-mile of the victim's home and one-third of the time within 200 feet of the home (Hanfland et al.,

1997). Nonfamily abductors are also likely to utilize a weapon in the commission of the offense (40-75 percent of nonfamily events) according to NISMART information, but NIBRS noted a lower rate (14 percent of acquaintance and 23 percent of stranger abductions) of weapon use (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000).

Overall, these findings show remarkable differences between the type of offender, victim, and offense characteristic across types of offense. They also reveal a need to better understand the compelling differences between stranger and acquaintance abductions rather than simply lumping such incidents into a single category of "nonfamily." Researchers have also considered the leading myths of child abduction (Shutt, Miller, Schreck, & Brown, 2004), the social construction of child safety moral panics (Zgoba, 2004), and gender as a covariate of abduction (Carmody & Plass, 2000). These works generally suggest the importance of separating incidents involving strangers and acquaintances as perpetrators for nonfamily abductions. Additionally, these studies utilize national missing children report data, an important point germane to the present study. As it is unclear to what extent past analyses have effectively disaggregated abductions from other missing children types, implications based on findings (almost entirely derived from national level studies) may be empirically tainted.

Data and Methods

Sample Description

The data for this study were obtained through the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) and included cases of abduction in South Carolina Uniform Crime Reports from 1991 to 1996. Cases with missing or inconsistent information regarding victim-offender relationship were excluded from the analysis, as our primary interest is determining differences in victim and offense characteristics dependent upon the victim-offender relationship across abduction type. This left a total of 868 cases for possible analysis. However, cases involving multiple victims and/or offenders, whether relationship specifics were known or not, were also eliminated to reduce confusion and possible measurement error resulting in a final data set of 671 abduction incidents involving one offender and one victim. The primary variable of interest is the relationship between the victim and offender as indicated by a three-prong typology: family member (indicated in case files as parent, stepparent, grandparent and "other" family), acquaintance, and stranger.

Demographic characteristics available on the victim were limited to gender, race, and age. Gender was coded simply as male or female and race coded as Black or White, since no other categories were represented. Age was included as both a continuous variable representing chronological age and as a categorical variable dividing ages into preschool (0-5), elementary school age (6-11), and middle/high school age (12-17), as children in these categories typically have different daily routine activity structures.

Characteristics of the incident itself that were available for analysis included day of the week, hour of the day, use of a weapon and premise on which the abduction occurred. Day of the week and hour of the day are primarily self-explanatory. Weapon was coded as no weapon, use of hands/personal weapon, and gun/knife. Premise was divided into four primary categories including home or apartment, school, parking lot,¹ and other. "Other" included a variety of locations that had a very small number of incidents not allowing for analysis of this specific category separately with various locales: bar ($n = 2$), gas station ($n = 1$), community ($n = 13$), convenience store ($n = 6$), hotel ($n = 3$), woods ($n = 8$), government building ($n = 3$), specialty store ($n = 1$), church ($n = 3$), and bus terminal ($n = 1$). Finally, demographic characteristics of the offender including gender and race were also available and were simply coded as male or female for gender and Black or White for race.

For our analysis, we first prepare basic frequency statistics on each of the variables to present a sample description. We then present bivariate analysis on each of the demographic and incident characteristics by type of offender to see if patterns exist that help to identify differences between family, stranger and acquaintance abductions. Chi-square tests are used to determine statistically significant differences across offender types. We also utilized multinomial logistic regression to determine whether the overall characteristics of the victim (gender, race, age) can in anyway predict the likelihood of abduction by a stranger rather than a family member or acquaintance.

Finally, we conduct additional preliminary multivariate analysis to see if incident and victim characteristic combinations may be used to predict whether assailants are more apt to be a family member, acquaintance, or stranger. Because our dependent variable (type of assailant) represents three discrete categories, we use multinomial logistic regression with family member as the reference category to which we compare acquaintance and stranger abductions. The multinomial logistic regression model takes the form: $\text{Logit}_{hik} = \alpha_k + X_{hi} B_k$ wherein k indexes the response category (stranger, acquaintance), X_{hi} represents the set of explanatory variables, and B_k represents the set of regression parameters. Results are then interpreted similar to a binomial logistic regression with each coefficient representing an increase or decrease in the odds of the assailant being of a given type dependent upon values of X .

Results

As shown in Table 1, females are more likely, 60 percent to 40 percent, to be abducted than males. Overall, Blacks and Whites are similarly likely to be

1. Parking lot including mall, community, gas station, school, department store, restaurant, grocery store, and apartment parking lots. Therefore, abductions in a school parking lot are included in this category rather than in the school category, abductions that took place in an apartment parking lot are also coded in this category rather than in the home/apartment category, and abductions that took place in a community parking lot are included in this category rather than in the "other" category with other community locations.

Table 1 Victim characteristics

	N	%
Gender		
Male	267	39.79
Female	404	60.21
Race		
White	374	55.74
Black	297	44.26
Age	671	
Missing	51	
1	53	7.90
2	50	7.45
3	43	6.41
4	33	4.92
5	31	4.62
6	20	2.98
7	29	4.32
8	27	4.02
9	26	3.87
10	14	2.09
11	23	3.43
12	37	5.51
13	47	7.00
14	54	8.05
15	54	8.05
16	67	9.99
17	12	2.00

abducted; however, while slightly over half our sample is White, it should be noted that Blacks make up about 29 percent of the population in South Carolina so they are over-represented (44 percent) in total abduction cases. Regarding age, a curvilinear pattern emerges with young children (0-5) and older children (12-17) more likely than the elementary school age children (6-11) to be abducted.

While Table 2 shows no relationship between day of the week and abduction, there is a noticeable pattern regarding time of day with more abductions occurring in the afterschool and evening hours between 2:00 and 9:00 pm.

Overall, abductions in this sample were more likely to involve hands only or no weapons. Also, abductions more often occurred in the victims home or apartment; however, notable numbers did occur along highways and in parking lots as well (Table 3).

Finally, we considered the gender and race of the offender and found that offenders are more likely to be male than female (the opposite of victims) and that there is no clear racial distinction. As with victims, Blacks are overrepresented

Table 2 Day and time of incident

	N	%
Day		
Sunday	71	10.58
Monday	103	15.35
Tuesday	90	13.41
Wednesday	100	14.90
Thursday	103	15.35
Friday	103	15.35
Saturday	101	15.05
Hour		
1:00 am	16	2.38
2:00 am	9	1.34
3:00 am	12	1.79
4:00 am	6	0.89
5:00 am	7	1.04
6:00 am	8	1.19
7:00 am	20	2.98
8:00 am	27	4.02
9:00 am	19	2.83
10:00 am	24	3.58
11:00 am	30	4.47
12:00 pm	26	3.87
1:00 pm	27	4.02
2:00 pm	42	6.26
3:00 pm	43	6.41
4:00 pm	53	7.90
5:00 pm	46	6.86
6:00 pm	40	5.96
7:00 pm	44	6.56
8:00 pm	48	7.15
9:00 pm	40	5.96
10:00 pm	27	4.02
11:00 pm	38	5.66
12:00 pm	19	2.83

in the offender population as compared to their proportion in the general population of South Carolina (Table 4).

Bivariate Analysis

Table 5 presents the basic demographic characteristics of the victim by type of assailant. The data reveal no distinct relationship between type of assailant and race of the victim. Regarding gender, however, female victims are more likely to

Table 3 Location and use of weapon in incident

	<i>N</i>	%
Premise		
Home/apartment	392	58.42
Highway	153	22.8
Parking lot	60	8.94
School	25	3.73
Other	41	6.11
Weapon		
Gun/knife	89	13.00
Hand/blunt instrument	541	81.00
None	41	6.00

Table 4 Gender and race of offender

	<i>N</i>	%
Gender		
Male	532	79.28
Female	139	20.72
Race		
White	361	53.80
Black	310	46.20

Table 5 Demographic characteristics of the victim by type of assailant

	Stranger	Family	Aquaintance	<i>p</i>
Gender				
Male	96 20.1%	115 44.6%	53 36.4%	0.005
Female	151 29.6%	132 32.8%	119 37.6%	
Race				
Black	101.0% 34.10%	107 36.10%	88.0% 29.70%	0.104
White	146 39.50%	140 37.80%	84 22.70%	
Age				
1-5	37 17.9%	124 59.9%	46 22.2%	.000
6-11	52 41.9%	49 39.5%	23 18.5%	
12-17	138 51.1%	44 16.3%	88 32.6%	

be abducted by a stranger than are male victims in this sample (30 percent female compared to 20 percent male). Male victims are then slightly more likely to be the victim of a family member with 45 percent of all male victims in this sample abducted by a family member compared to 33 percent of female victims. When the assailant is defined as an acquaintance, there is no apparent difference in preferred gender of the victim with 38 percent of all female victims in the sample abducted by an acquaintance compared to 36 percent of male victims.

An even more distinct pattern regarding age of victim and type of assailant was observed. As expected, younger victims appear much more likely to be abducted by a family member. For preschool age children (0-5 years of age) the assailant is a family member approximately 60 percent of the time, for elementary school age children (ages 6-11) this percentage drops to about 40, and by the preteen and teenage years the percent kidnapped by a family member is only 16. Not surprisingly, an inverse relationship appears when the assailant is a stranger with only 18 percent of preschool age children abducted by a stranger, 42 percent of elementary school age children, and 51 percent of teenagers. No distinct pattern for age of victim appears however when the assailant is an acquaintance.

Table 6 provides a snapshot of some specific characteristics of our population abduction incidents including: (1) use of a weapon, (2) day, and (3) location of incidents. Regarding use of a weapon, our findings support the expected assumption that a stranger is more likely to rely on use of a weapon in abduction than is a family member with 57 percent of strangers using a gun or knife compared to 30 percent of acquaintances and only 12 percent of family members. Also expected, when the assailant is a family member, abduction is much more likely to have occurred at the home (53 percent compared to 31 percent of incidents when the assailant was an acquaintance and only 17 percent when the assailant was a stranger). Conversely, strangers appear much more likely to attack in locations such as a highway or parking lot. Specifically, when the incident occurred along a highway or in a parking lot, the assailant was a stranger about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the time. Interestingly though, when the incident occurs at a school, the assailant is about as likely to be a family member (48 percent of the times) as a stranger (40 percent of the time). Perhaps most interesting though is that acquaintance assailants seem to follow no distinct pattern either similar to a family member or similar to a stranger.

Moving to the day and time of the event (Figure 1), there is no observable relationship between day of the week and type of assailant. The relationships between time of day and type of assailant are slightly complicated. We assessed this relationship first as a continuous relationship (hours 1-24) and then by attempting to group the day into "periods" such as before school, during school, after school and night. For all assailant types (Figure 2), the number of abductions is lowest in the early morning hours (midnight through about 6:00-7:00 am) and then continues to increase throughout the day. The risk of abductions by a stranger peaks the earliest in the day at about 5:00 pm (after school hours) and then begins to decrease. For family members, the peak is around 9:00 pm (late

Table 6 Characteristics of abduction incident by type of assailant

	Stranger	Family	Aquaintance	<i>p</i>
Weapon				0.000
Hands	137 25.6%	208 38.8%	191 35.6%	
Gun/knife	51 57.3%	11 12.4%	27 30.3%	
None	5 12.2%	28 68.3%	8 19.5%	
Premise				0.000
Home/apartment	64 16.5%	205 52.8%	119 30.7%	
School	10 40.0%	12 48.0%	3 12.0%	
Parking lot	42 71.2%	7 11.9%	10 16.9%	
Highway	113 73.9%	9 5.9%	31 20.3%	
Other	18 43.9%	14 34.1%	9 22.0%	
Day of week				0.903
Monday	36 35.3%	39 38.2%	27 26.5%	
Tuesday	39 43.3%	31 34.4%	20 22.2%	
Wednesday	38 38.4%	39 39.4%	22 22.2%	
Thursday	40 38.8%	36 35.0%	27 26.2%	
Friday	36 35.0%	39 37.9%	28 27.2%	
Saturday	36 35.0%	32 32.3%	31 31.3%	
Sunday	22 31.4%	31 44.3%	17 24.3%	

evening), and for acquaintances, 11:00 pm is the peak risk time. Again, the pattern for “acquaintance” is the most volatile following a less distinct pattern than that of stranger and family abductions.

Table 7 then presents information on the demographic characteristics of the assailant. In this sample, there is no significant racial difference based on type of assailant, however, there is a significant difference in gender. As might be expected and consistent with the extant abduction literature, female assailants are much more likely to be family members with 66 percent of all female assailants being family members of the victim compared to 30 percent of male assailants. When the assailant was a stranger to the victim, the assailant was female less

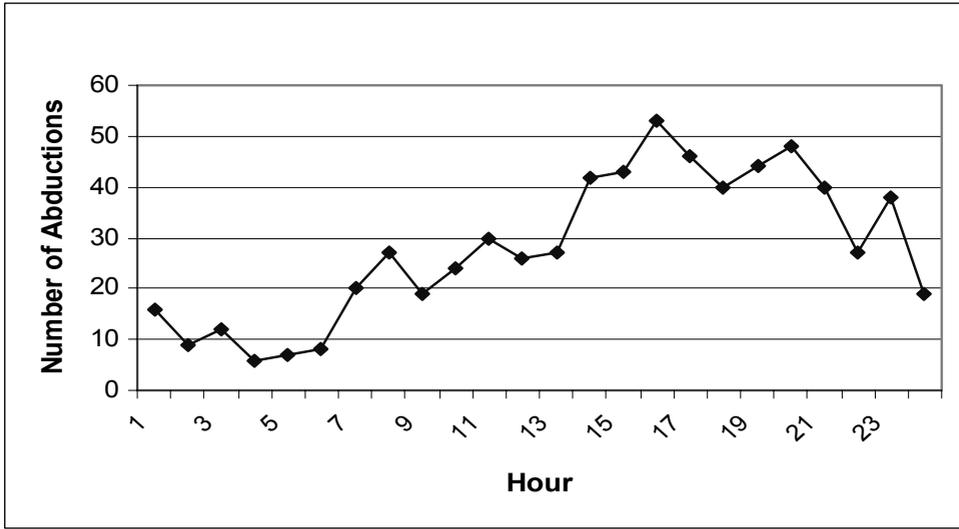


Figure 1 Time of day of abductions.

than 9 percent of the time, while the assailant was male about 45 percent of the time. When the relationship between the assailant and victim is defined as “acquaintance,” the distribution across genders is almost identical at 25 percent.

Multivariate Analysis

Because the abduction that is most often feared by parents is that by a stranger, we examined whether specific victim characteristic combinations

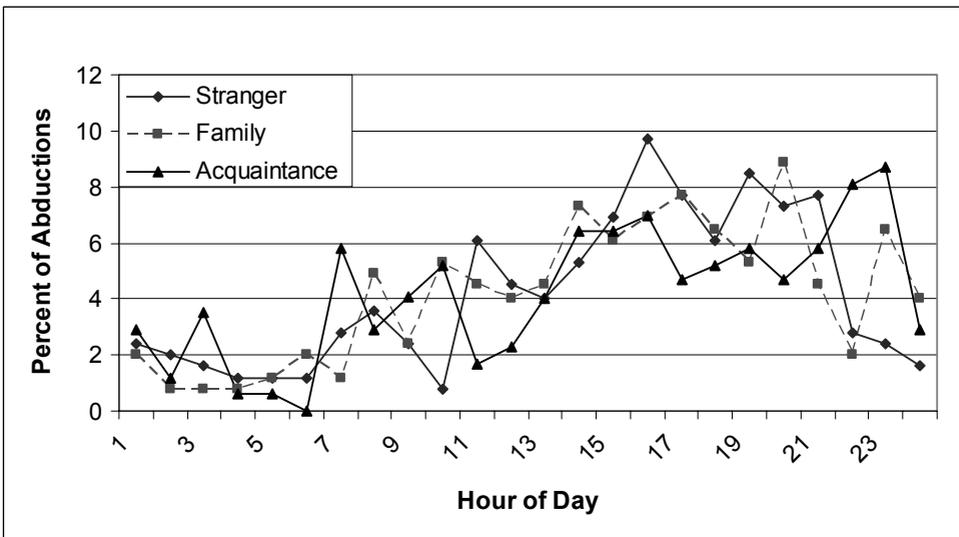


Figure 2 Kidnappings by hour of day and type of assailant.

Table 7 Characteristics of offender by type of offender

	Stranger	Family	Acquaintance	<i>p</i>
Offender gender				0.000
Male	235 44.5%	156 29.5%	137 25.9%	
Female	12 8.7%	91 65.9%	35 25.4%	
Offender race				0.187
Black	111 35.9%	108 35.0%	90 29.1%	
White	136 38.1%	139 38.9%	82 23.0%	

might predict this type of offender. Specifically, we examined the age, race and gender of the victim and observed different patterns not only between family and stranger abductions, but between stranger and acquaintance as well. The most typical feared abduction is that of a young or teenage girl by a stranger. Our analysis shows that, after controlling for race and age, a stranger is in fact no more likely to abduct a female than is a family member. However, it is acquaintance abduction where female victims are most likely to be targeted.

Controlling for gender and age, again we find that neither family members nor stranger abduction show no pattern with race; however, acquaintance abductions are more likely to involve a Black victim. Finally, both stranger and acquaintance abductions are more likely than family abductions to involve older victims. Specifically, offenders who are acquaintances are 77 percent less likely than a family member to abduct a child up to 5, while they are 71 percent less likely to abduct a child ages 6-11. The difference is even more striking between

Table 8 Multivariate analysis: type of offender by victim characteristics (reference: Family Member Abduction)

	β	Wald	Significance	Exp(<i>B</i>)
Intercept	.03	.019	.891	
Acquaintance				
Female	.449	3.747	.053	1.57
Black	.448	4.093	.043	1.57
Age 1-5	-1.483	32.980	.000	.23
Age 6-11	-1.247	17.871	.000	.29
Stranger				
Female	-0.003	0.000	.988	.997
Black	0.103	0.244	.621	1.109
Age 1-5	-2.491	84.103	.000	.083
Age 6-11	-1.029	17.505	.000	.357

family and stranger abductions, with strangers being almost 92 percent less likely to abduct up to a 5 year old than a family member and 64 percent less likely to abduct a 6-11 year old.

Conclusions

There are clear advantages to studying large, longitudinal (for the phenomenon) data sets of abduction at the state level. Access to investigative case files enables determination and isolation of abduction from other missing children incidents such as abandonment and homelessness attributable to runaway scenarios. While still large enough for viable statistical analysis, data can be confirmed so as to delete unsubstantiated and erroneously categorized events. Relatedly, measurement error can be minimized by avoiding duplication (as in our deletion of cases with multiple offenders and/or victims).

In general, our findings were consistent with previous studies in regard to family abduction with the notable exception that family members are just as likely as strangers to abduct young girls. Ostensibly, the nature of outcome and recovery vary considerably according to these abductor types. By dichotomizing non-stranger abduction into family and acquaintance categories, we observed certain acquaintance-specific risks, specifically in terms of offender and victim characteristics as well as location of event. Age and gender findings generally confirm that sexual motive is pronounced for young and teenage girls alike, with victim age being a function of offender characteristics.

Consideration of our findings overall, however, suggests that while many types of abduction events are predictable and thus presumably responsive to both prevention and recovery efforts, many others are not. Recent policy initiatives, such as the 2006 Uniform Child Abduction Prevention Act, are clearly better suited to deter family abductions—primarily because leading suspects are known and familial situations can be assessed prior to offense attempts. While this study did not empirically address recovery strategies and how these vary in terms of effectiveness by offender and victim characteristics, victim-offender relationship, and abduction environment, we did confirm the threat of stranger abduction which, due to unpredictability and often absent or limited suspect information, remains an unlikely but real threat.

Even more troubling is our observation of acquaintance abduction. On the one hand, abductors are known to parents and easily identified, thus making orienting recovery activity around probable suspects. The same familiarity enabling identification, however, likely makes abduction itself more easily executed and possibly prolongs recovery. The nature of acquaintance abduction, especially when coupled with stranger abduction, then, reveals that at a minimum, abduction can and often is a highly unpredictable event. While it is extremely unlikely that a stereotypical nightmarish stranger or acquaintance abduction will happen to any single child, when abduction does occur there are limits to the criminal justice system's response capability in situations largely

defined by unknown factors. While urgency-driven multifaceted recovery strategies utilizing technology such as AMBER Alert programs augment successful recovery, some cases tragically end in sexual assault and/or homicide. Given the unpredictability of abduction, generally, and acquaintance and stranger abduction, specifically, the findings from this study support greater use of prevention practices. Widespread behavioral skills training for teaching prevention skills (e.g., avoiding lures, distance from possible threats, and immediately informing an adult) to preschool children and even escape techniques for older children (e.g., physical escape, hiding, and assistance contact instruction) may well be the next major system thrust against the exaggerated, but real, threat of child abduction.

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