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NISMART

National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Throwaway Children

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Highlights From the NISMART Bulletins

The National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Throwaway Children (NISMART) consist of several complementary studies designed to estimate the size and nature of the Nation's missing children problem. NISMART-2, the second such set of studies (the first, NISMART-1, was conducted in 1988), provides national estimates of missing children based on surveys of households, juvenile residential facilities, and law enforcement agencies.¹ The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) is disseminating a series of Bulletins that summarize findings from NISMART-2. This Fact Sheet highlights key findings presented in the first four NISMART Bulletins: National Estimates of Missing Children: An Overview (NCJ 196465), Nonfamily Abducted Children: National Estimates and Characteristics (NCJ 196467), Children Abducted by Family Members: National Estimates and Characteristics (NCJ 196466), and Runaway/Throwaway Children: National Estimates and Characteristics (NCJ 196469).

National Estimates of Missing Children

Key findings presented in the NISMART Bulletin *National Estimates of Missing Children: An Overview* include the following:

- ◆ The total number of children who were missing from their caretakers in 1999 (i.e., their caretakers did not know their whereabouts and were alarmed for at least an hour while trying to locate them) is estimated to be 1,315,600.
- ◆ Nearly all of the caretaker missing children (1,312,800 or 99.8 percent) were returned home alive or located by the time the study data were collected. Only a fraction of a percent (0.2 percent or 2,500) of all caretaker missing children had not returned home or been located, and the vast majority of these were runaways from institutions who had been identified in the survey of juvenile residential facilities.

- ◆ The number of missing children who were reported missing in 1999 (i.e., reported to the police or missing children's agencies in order to locate them) was estimated to be 797,500, which is equivalent to a rate of 11.4 children per 1,000 in the U.S. population.
- ◆ Most of the caretaker missing children became missing because they ran away (48 percent) or because of benign misunderstandings or miscommunications about where they should be (28 percent).
- ◆ Children who were missing because they became lost or injured accounted for 15 percent of all caretaker missing children.

¹ The NISMART-2 studies spanned the years 1997 to 1999. All data were collected to reflect a 12-month period. Because the vast majority of cases were from studies concentrated in 1999, the Bulletins refer to 1999 as the annual period.

- ◆ Less than one-tenth (9 percent) of caretaker missing children were abducted by family members, and only 3 percent were abducted by nonfamily perpetrators.

Nonfamily Abducted Children

Key findings presented in the NISMART Bulletin *Nonfamily Abducted Children: National Estimates and Characteristics* include the following:

- ◆ During the study year, there were an estimated 115 stereotypical kidnappings, defined as abductions perpetrated by a stranger or slight acquaintance and involving a child who was transported 50 or more miles, detained overnight, held for ransom or with intent to keep the child permanently, or killed.
- ◆ In 40 percent of stereotypical kidnappings, the child was killed, and in another 4 percent, the child was not recovered.
- ◆ An estimated 58,200 children were victims of nonfamily abduction, defined more broadly to include all nonfamily perpetrators (friends and acquaintances as well as strangers) and crimes involving lesser amounts of forced movement or detention, in addition to the more serious crimes entailed in stereotypical kidnappings.
- ◆ Fifty-seven percent of children abducted by a nonfamily perpetrator were missing from caretakers for at least 1 hour, and 21 percent of the abducted children were reported to the police for help in locating the children.
- ◆ Teenagers were, by far, the most frequent victims of both stereotypical kidnappings and nonfamily abductions.
- ◆ Nearly half of all child victims of stereotypical kidnappings and nonfamily abductions were sexually assaulted by the perpetrator.

Children Abducted by Family Members

Key findings presented in the NISMART Bulletin *Children Abducted by Family Members: National Estimates and Characteristics* include the following:

- ◆ An estimated 203,900 children were victims of a family abduction in 1999. Among these, 117,200 were missing from their caretakers, and, of these, an estimated 56,500 were reported to authorities for assistance in locating the children.

- ◆ Forty-three percent of the family abducted children were not considered missing by their caretakers because the caretakers knew the children's whereabouts or were not alarmed by the circumstances.
- ◆ Forty-four percent of family abducted children were younger than age 6.
- ◆ Fifty-three percent of family abducted children were abducted by their biological father, and 25 percent were abducted by their biological mother.
- ◆ Forty-six percent of family abducted children were gone less than a week, and 21 percent were gone 1 month or more. Six percent had not yet returned at the time of the survey interview.

Runaway/Thrownaway Children

Key findings presented in the NISMART Bulletin *Runaway/Thrownaway Children: National Estimates and Characteristics* include the following:

- ◆ In 1999, an estimated 1,682,900 youth had a runaway/thrownaway episode (i.e., either ran away from home or were thrown out by their caretaker). Of these youth, 37 percent were missing from their caretakers and 21 percent were reported to authorities for purposes of locating the youth.
- ◆ Of the total runaway/thrownaway youth, an estimated 1,190,900 (71 percent) could have been endangered during their runaway/thrownaway episode by virtue of factors such as substance dependency, use of hard drugs, sexual or physical abuse, presence in a place where criminal activity was occurring, or very young age (13 or younger).
- ◆ Youth ages 15–17 made up two-thirds of the youth with runaway/thrownaway episodes.

For Further Information

The Bulletins present more detailed analyses and explanations of these findings, including specific definitions of episode types and information about the methodology used to calculate the estimates. To view or download the Bulletins, a *NISMART Questions and Answers Fact Sheet*, and future NISMART-related publications, visit OJJDP's Web site, ojjdp.ncjrs.org.