Modus Operandi and Stranger Child Abduction: Comparing Attempted and Completed Cases
The Good News...

Those are the worst case scenario

Abduction by Strangers is Rare:

• **300,000+** Missing Persons a year; **247** Abductions a year (Newiss & Traynor, 2013).

• 75% of those are ‘attempts’.

Most cases do NOT end in death or serious harm*

• Finkelhor and Ormrod (2000) found that less than **0.1%** of abductions end in death.

Numbers are going up.

• But we’re pretty sure there isn’t actually more crime (Newiss & Collie, 2016)

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Q: **How likely is it that a child will be abducted?**

A: Police recorded child abduction or kidnapping is relatively rare. 7.4 offences of child abduction or kidnapping per 100,000 children were recorded by police in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2013/14. However, many incidents go unreported to, or unrecorded by, the police.
The Two ‘Strands’ of Abduction Research: Brief History

Victorian Era: Pre-Research
(Noor-Mohamed, 2013)

1970’s-1980’s America: Panic!
(Best 1987; 1988)

1990s: Call for Calm
(Finkelhor et al, 1992)

Then until now: Debate!!

Same time, but separate:
Training Children (e.g.,
Moran, 1997)
Abduction Types: as of 2016

- Acquaintance - 27%
- Family - 48%
- Stranger - 16%
- Paramour - 9%

(Walsh et al, 2016)
Types of Stranger Child Abduction: Finding the Balance

**Stranger**

- **Harm**
  - Mostly on Fatal cases.
  - Police orientated. Prefer the non-family category

- **Motive**
  - Sexual
  - Violent
  - Maternal Desire
  - Revenge
  - Ransom
  - Other Crime/Accident
  - False Appeals

- **Outcome**
  - Was the offence ‘attempted’, or was it ‘completed’.
  - Newiss & Fairbrother, 2006; Collie, 2016a, b, c.
Our Research Areas

Victim, Offender and Offence Characteristics

Guardianship

Victim Resistance

Offender Behaviour

Stranger Child Abduction
The Research: Methods

- The study collected information from legal and media sources.
  - Resulted in a sample of 78 OFFENCES.
  - This includes 55 offenders and 83 victims
- Only includes cases where the victim and offender were pure strangers, and with a conviction in law, were used.
- Combined total of 16 variables relating to Modus Operandi (see tables on upcoming slide).

Main differentiator was attempt vs complete, and whether “escalation” had occurred. Escalation refers to another offence being carried out in the same offence sequence.

Analytical approach: Multi-dimensional scaling
Roughly 150m from abduction site to escalation site, led victim that distance

Around 200m from escalation site to 2nd CCTV sighting site

CCTV Second Time

Likely Trajectory, speculative

Spotted on CCTV

Assault

Led Victim
Abduction Sites from Sample
### TABLE 4  Aggressive control variable frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Attempted</th>
<th></th>
<th>Completed</th>
<th></th>
<th>All cases</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grab</td>
<td>40.60%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>40.40%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>46.15%</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Front loaded control</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>42.10%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>35.90%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single line before attack</td>
<td>9.40%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.00%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.54%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>49.10%</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>46.15%</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvised tool</td>
<td>9.40%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>31.60%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26.92%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brought tool</td>
<td>18.80%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19.30%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21.79%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weapon</td>
<td>15.60%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22.80%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23.08%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ties</td>
<td>3.10%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24.60%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19.23%</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle</td>
<td>31.30%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>42.10%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>43.59%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat</td>
<td>18.80%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40.40%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>37.18%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acted on threat</td>
<td>3.10%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26.30%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20.51%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>6.30%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>70.20%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>53.85%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
<td>31.30%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>57.90%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>55.13%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple offender</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.30%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14.10%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 5  Manipulative control variable frequencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Attempted</th>
<th></th>
<th>Completed</th>
<th></th>
<th>All Cases</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulate</td>
<td>43.80%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>49.10%</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>53.85%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple victims</td>
<td>9.40%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17.50%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeal to authority</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentive</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26.92%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Request for assistance</td>
<td>6.30%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer of assistance</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation</td>
<td>21.90%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>33.32%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

70.5% of cases involving a ‘shift’ were completed.
Offender Behaviour

‘Manipulative’
Includes: Help/See the puppy; Ask for Directions; Offer Help; Pretend to Know; Feign Shared Interests.
Quite rare: Offering sweets. Only 1 case in study of 78

‘Coercive’
Includes: Assault; Threats against child; Threats against family; Tool use; ‘One liner’.
Manipulative Control Strategies

- ‘Appeals’ to Authority
- ‘Appeals’ to Familiarity
- ‘Appeals’ to Empathy
- ‘Appeals’ to Responsibility

Tedisco & Paludi, 1998; Collie & Shalev Greene, 2019.
Offender Behaviour: Interesting Findings

‘Shift’

Why is this an issue?: Most child abduction literature tackles ‘lures’. 

Experienced Offenders: Old vs Young
(from Collie & Shalev Greene, 2017)
Conclusions

• Complexity comes from ‘shift’, not elaborate schemes.

• Role of front-loaded control, e.g., overwhelming the victim.

• Manipulative vs Aggressive may be more accurate than lure vs blitz

• Previously recognised strategies largely present. New ones in ‘appeal to responsibility’.

• Some stereotypical strategies not found, e.g., offering sweets.