Developing and testing a Self-Administered Interview in Missing Persons Investigations

SAI-MISPER

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Missing Persons Investigations

- It is important to gather an accurate description of the missing person as well as their usual behaviour and habits

- Reliable information obtained might become useful intelligence if the case broadens into a criminal investigation

- The success of an investigation often centres around the quality of information obtained in the early stages
The Self-Administered Interview (SAI)

Enables investigative interviewers to obtain good quality evidence from witnesses, quickly, and efficiently.

Gabbert et al (2009)
Overview of key SAI research findings

To date, over 20 separate laboratory tests of the SAI conducted.

- Consistent findings that SAI instructions produce significantly more correct information than a standard recall instruction.

Completing an SAI after witnessing a (mock) crime -

- Elicits high quality reliable information
- Protects against forgetting
- Protects against memory distortions caused by exposure to misleading questions and erroneous post event information
- Enhances performance in a subsequent interview

Increasingly recognised and endorsed in police practice internationally
Missing Person Investigation SAI

We propose that a “Self-Administered Interview” may be an ideal information-gathering tool for use in a missing persons investigation

Potential benefits:

1. Obtain reliable information deemed relevant for the investigation
2. Help focusing the attention and the sharing of sensitive information in the early stages of the investigation
3. Reduce the adverse psychological effects for those close to the missing person
4. Standardise procedure across forces
5. Cost-effective (time and resource-saving)
SAI-Missing Research

Stage 1. The focus group:
• What do practitioners think of the SAI-MISPER?
• Can it add value to the current practice?
• What are its perceived benefit?
• What can it help with?

Stage 2. Test the SAI-MISPER:
• Is the SAI-MISPER an effective information gathering tool?
• What information is it able to elicit?
• Can we facilitate retrieval for important information?
Stage 1. Focus group

Potential benefits:
- SAI-MISPER can add value to current procedure (not to replace it)
- Could help standardise procedure across the country
- Potentially useful in a number of situations:
  - in the follow-up of cold cases
  - as a pre-attendance form
  - upon the person’s return

No suggestions for changes to the proposed experimental study

Considerations for the future:
- Format, i.e. printed vs online
- Suitable to who, i.e. adults
MISSING PERSON INVESTIGATION
SELF-ADMINISTERED INTERVIEW

This booklet contains questions for you to answer about the person who is missing.

It has been designed for you to complete independently without the need of a police officer, so that you can take all the time you need to gather information and answer the questions.

The officer assigned to your case will ask you for it later, so that any information you provide can be used in the investigation.

There are four different sections, each with instructions that will guide you through how to report different types of information that might be useful for the investigation:

1. The person's normal routine and behaviour
2. Circumstances surrounding the disappearance
3. Providing a physical description of the person who is missing
4. What else can you do to help?

Please be aware that any information you provide might prove incredibly useful in the search. However, it is not compulsory to complete this booklet and you are free to report as little or as much information as you wish.

Finally, do not worry if you don’t have, or cannot get, all of the information the form asks for, as some of it won’t apply to everyone.

If you have any questions, please contact the issuing officer using the details below.

PLEASE FILL IN YOUR DETAILS BELOW:

Name:
Age: Date of Birth: DD / MM / YYYY
Address:
Postcode:
Home Number:
Mobile Number:
Email:

DO NOT PROCEED UNTIL YOU HAVE PROVIDED THE INFORMATION REQUIRED ABOVE.

THIS DOCUMENT WAS ISSUED TO YOU BY:
Name:
Police Force:
Telephone Number:
Your Incident Reference Number is:
Date of Issue: DD / MM / YYYY

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SECTION 1

Normal routine and behaviour

During a Missing Person investigation it is often important to understand the person’s personality and lifestyle, including any factors that might have lead to their disappearance.

Based on your knowledge of the person who is missing, please tell us what you think has happened and where they might be.

It is also helpful to have as much information as possible about the person’s normal routines, behaviours, and habits, and whether there have been any recent changes to these.

Please take time to think about the missing person’s usual routine and behaviours, for example:

- Times and places they usually have to be (e.g., work, classes, meetings, appointments, religious activities, sports activities, seeing friends, school run, etc.)
- Locations of interest or significance, and/or frequently visited by him/her (e.g. favourite places, hang outs, normal routes taken, frequented locations abroad)
- His or her social life, relationships, hobbies.
- Frequency of phone usage, or social media sites (e.g., Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook).
- Their normal mood or demeanour.
- Normal bank card usage, mobile phone usage, email, etc.
- Use of medication

It might help to put some of this information in the table below:

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<th>Mon</th>
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<th>Wed</th>
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</tbody>
</table>
SECTION 2

Circumstances surrounding the disappearance

Personal circumstances that we should be aware of -

Is there anything that might be causing the missing person anxiety, stress, or suffering? This might be something that has already happened or that will be happening in the future. Life stressors can be negative or positive (positive events such as promotion, marriage, etc., can also be stressful). For example -

- Any recent/upcoming significant events (e.g., anniversary, good or bad news):
- Any significant changes at work/school/university/personal life:
- Any recent life troubles (e.g., family, financial, or work):
- Any intimate information that might be significant (an affair, a recent argument, etc.):
- Any relevant family episodes (divorce, losses, anniversaries, birth, marriage, moving):
- Any significant incidents (racist incident, victim or perpetrator of domestic violence, sexual abuse, homophobic incident, bullying):
- Any religious beliefs/influences:

If so, please provide information below (if there is anyone else you know who could provide additional details, please inform us here, and report relevant contact details on page 2).
SECTION 3

Provide a physical description of the person who is missing

Having a detailed physical description of the person who is missing is vital when searching for him or her. The instructions below will help you provide this.

Thinking about a specific memory you have of the person who is missing will help you picture them more clearly, so that you are then able to provide a detailed description of what they look like. Take time to think of the last time you were together, or a recent occasion when you spent time together. Try to remember:

- Where you were
- What you were doing
- What you were talking about
- Who else was with you
- How you were feeling at that time
- What you could see and hear
- Whether anything particularly memorable happened

It may help to shut your eyes while you concentrate on the memory.

Don’t worry if you are not able to remember this occasion in as much detail as you would like. It is the act of taking time to concentrate on what he or she looks like that is important.

Hold the memory in your mind, then read through the list of memory cues below to see if they help you remember information that we will find useful.

- Height / Weight / Build (say if exact or approximate)
- Facial appearance (shape of eyes, ears, mouth, nose, etc.)
- Complexion: (clear skin, freckles, acne, ruddy, etc.)
- Teeth: (condition, gaps, chips, crowns / fillings / false teeth / gold teeth, etc.)
- Hair Style / Colour / Length (dyed or natural?)
- Facial hair / body hair: Style / Colour
- Nails: (manicured, long, short, bitten, nail-polish, etc.)
- Any identifying marks: Scars / Tattoos / Piercings / etc. (give locations)
- Any medical implants or prosthetics (give details)
- Distinguishing physical characteristics / deformities (give details)

Think! Are there any other details that we have not asked about?

On the next page please provide a detailed physical description of the person who is missing (use additional paper, if necessary). Use sketches too if they help you provide additional information.

- Be as complete and accurate as possible.
- If you ever report anything that you are not sure about, then please say.
- Do not guess details you are unsure of.
Can you tell us what they are wearing?

If you were one of the last people to see the person who is missing, you might be able to provide a detailed description of how they looked at that time, including the clothes and jewellery he/she was wearing, any personal effects, and/or accessories they had with them.

Can you provide this information?

☐ No : Skip this section and continue to Section 4

☐ Yes : Please read the instructions below.

If ‘Yes’, please read all of the instructions below before providing a description to the best of your ability.

First, take time to remember the last time you were with him or her. Focus on where you were, what you could see, what you were doing, and how you were feeling at the time.

Holding this memory in your mind, read through the list of memory cues below to see if they help you remember information that we will find useful.

- Clothing: Head & neck (hat, scarf, tie, hairband, etc.)
- Clothing: Upper body (coat, jumper, cardigan, t-shirt, shirt/blouse, vest, dress, etc.)
- Clothing: Lower body (trousers, jeans, skirt, tights, socks, swimwear, shorts, etc.)
- Footwear (shoes, boots, sandals, flip-flops, heels, sports shoes, etc.)
- Accessories (watch, glasses, sunglasses, belt, gloves, hair slide, cufflinks, bag, etc.)
- Jewellery (necklace, bracelet, rings, earrings, watch, piercings, inscriptions, etc.)
- Personal effects (bag, mobile phone, purse/wallet, ID card, keys, passport, etc.)

Think! Are there any other details that we have not asked about?

On the next page please provide a detailed description of the person’s clothing, and what they might have with them (use additional paper, if necessary). Include information about colour, style, size, make, appearance, motifs, labels, fabric, etc. if possible.

Use sketches too if they help you provide additional information.

- Be as complete and accurate as possible.
- If you ever report anything that you are not sure about, then please say.
- Do not guess details you are unsure of.
What else can you do to help?

Please gather and be ready to provide as much information as possible about the following (tick when done)

- Any appropriate recent and clear photographs of the missing person. It may also be helpful if you have an electronic photo, so it can be emailed to the Police. We can send a copy to our front line staff on their mobile phones.
- A list of any relevant items missing such as their toothbrush, wallet, travel card, passport, suitcase, clothing, medication, make-up, favourite possessions, etc. (only list those that are definitely missing).
- A list of social networking sites used by the person (Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter, Snapchat, any dating websites, etc.).
- A list of known medical conditions (illnesses, allergies, mental health problems, etc.)
- Identification documents (Passport, Identification cards). Please list numbers where possible.
- Visas, work-permits, etc. Please list expiry dates where possible.
- A list of anyone you think we should be speaking to or giving this form to (friends, colleagues, family members, etc.)? Please provide their contact details where possible.

Finally, is there any other information you think might be relevant to tell us about?
Stage 2. Test the SAI-MISPER

Aim
Test the efficacy of the SAI-MISPER in gathering good quality information

Experimental design
SAI-MISPER vs. Control

Procedure

Study 1: 65 participants tested individually. Required to imagine someone they knew well and had seen in last 24 hours has been reported missing for the past 24 hours. Random allocation to SAI or control form.
Study 1 results: *amount*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Physical Description</th>
<th>MISPERSAI (n = 32) Mean (SD)</th>
<th>CONTROL (n = 33) Mean (SD)</th>
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<th>Clothing &amp; Personal Effects</th>
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<th>CONTROL (n = 33) Mean (SD)</th>
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<td>Total amount*</td>
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*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01
Stage 2. Test the SAI-MISPER

Aim
Test the efficacy of the SAI-MISPER in gathering good quality information

Experimental design
SAI-MISPER vs. Control

Procedure
Study 2: 60 participants tested in pairs, but immediately separated into different rooms and instructed to imagine that the person they came with had gone missing. Completed either one of the two booklets.

Amount & accuracy
Study 2 results: amount

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* indicates a significant difference.
Study 2 results: accuracy

Accuracy of information

Physical Description

Clothing & Personal Effects

SAI-MISPERS
Control

*
Next steps......field trial

Examine the effectiveness of the SAI-MISPER:

- For the investigative process: does the SAI-MISPER elicit reliable information? Does it help gathering additional information?

- For the police: do officers find it practical to administer? Does it speed up the information gathering process, or does it create more admin work?

- For the informant: is the tool user friendly? Does it improve the informant’s experience (i.e. facilitate the immediate sharing of information, understanding of relevant information needed)?
Thank you

Questions / thoughts / feedback are all welcome

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