Study to Identify the Risk Factors that Predict Which Children will Repeatedly Go Missing

A Collaboration Between BU and Dorset Police

Background
- Missing children face significant risks. Children who frequently run away are especially vulnerable to dangers including, exploitation and sexual abuse.
- Collaborating with Dorset Police, the objective was to understand the nature and extent of missing children, find out what works best to reduce the number of children who runaway and then use this knowledge to influence policing practice.

Latest Statistics
- Someone is reported missing every 90 seconds in the UK & over 60% of these are children.¹
- Common reasons why children runaway are: abuse, neglect, sexual exploitation and mental health
- 38% of missing children return home, only to go missing again a short time later.¹
- Children who go missing three or more times are at exceptionally higher risk of physical and sexual exploitation.¹
- Missing children create a huge demand on public services, equating to 14% of police time and costing between £394 and £509 million annually.²

Research Method
- The study analysed all missing child reports in Dorset Police for one year (1st July 2018 – 30th June 2019): 909 children, 3213 incidents.
- Two groups were compared; children who run away more than once (n=389); and those who are “one-off” runaways (n=520).
- Using logistic regression, potential predictive variables (risk factors) were identified in order to provide a means of identifying individuals most at risk of repeatedly going missing.

Results - Descriptive
- 87.4% missing children were aged over 12 years, with roughly equal number of males (56%) and females (44%).

Over 80% were repeat disappearances.

A small minority of children who repeatedly go missing (8.3%), accounted for over half of all incidents;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent of Repeat Disappearances by Children in the Sample</th>
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<td>No. of Disappearances</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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Results – Statistical Model
- Statistical analysis found the likelihood of a child going missing on multiple occasions is associated with being:
  - a victim of criminal exploitation,
  - a perpetrator of violence,
  - arrested,
  - in care, and
  - having adverse childhood experiences.
- These five variables were incorporated into a logistic regression model.
- The final model was able to correctly classify 78.2% of high-risk children (missing more than once) and 90.4% low risk children (one off runaways).
- Overall success rate was 85%, a considerable improvement from base rate prediction of 57.2%.

Conclusions
- By targeting repeat missing children the police could make sizeable reductions in their demand.
- Using background and lifestyle information, it is possible to predict the likelihood of a child going missing repeatedly.
- By using the proposed 5 variable model, police officers and other professionals will be able to quickly and reliably identify high-risk children, even before they go missing, allowing prevention strategies to be put in place.

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References
3. By targeting repeat missing children the police could make sizeable reductions in their demand.
4. Using background and lifestyle information, it is possible to predict the likelihood of a child going missing repeatedly.
5. By using the proposed 5 variable model, police officers and other professionals will be able to quickly and reliably identify high-risk children, even before they go missing, allowing prevention strategies to be put in place.

Note: * Criminal exploitation, violence, ACE, self-harm, previous arrest history, family status, mental health, gender and age; ** History of criminal exploitation, violence, ACE, previous arrest history and family status.