



## Missing Children Episodes Declined In The 1990s, UNH Professor's Study Finds

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**Editors: David Finkelhor is available for interviews Jan. 13 at (207) 883-4979. Friday, Jan. 14, he is available on the Durham campus at (603) 862-2761.**

DURHAM, N.H. – The decade of the 1990s saw a decline in the number of children who ran away, got lost or were abducted by family members, according to a new study released today by the U.S. Department of Justice. Moreover, no type of missing child episodes experienced an increase.

The findings emerged from a report based on the second National Incidence Study of Missing, Abducted, Runaway and Thrownaway children (NISMART-2), on which University of New Hampshire Professor David Finkelhor was one of the lead researchers.

According to Finkelhor, “This is one more piece of evidence that the 1990s were kind to young people.” Among other improvements, he pointed out that by the end of the decade child sexual abuse had declined, poverty among children decreased, teen suicide and teen pregnancy declined, and children were perpetrators and victims of fewer crimes. Some of these improvements have continued during the last few years as well.

Finkelhor said he and other researchers are not certain about all the reasons for the improvements. The economy improved during the 1990s, but divorce and family disruption continued to affect a large number of young people.

The report speculates that improved communication technology and the availability of cell phones may have made it easier to locate children and may have improved communication between parents and children, leading perhaps to fewer lost child and runaway episodes. Family abductions may have declined due to court reforms, mediation services, more equitable child custody arrangements and greater public awareness about the dangers and negative effects of unilateral custody actions.

Finkelhor added that perhaps the decline in sexual abuse is connected to less running away and family abduction, and he also pointed to the increased use of psychiatric medication, which may have reduced depression, anxiety and family conflict, the main source of these problems.

The study, “National Estimates of Missing Children: Selected Trends 1988-1999,” authored by Heather Hammer, Finkelhor, Andrea Sedlak and Lorraine Porcellini, based its findings on

surveys with national samples of several thousand parents.