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UNH Researchers Find Acquaintance Kidnaping a Troubling Statistic

By [Tracy Manforte](#)
UNH News Bureau

July 25, 2000

DURHAM, N.H. -- A new analysis of FBI data by University of New Hampshire researchers suggests that three-quarters of the child kidnappings investigated by police involve family members and acquaintances. The surprise, according to the report, is the magnitude of the acquaintance kidnaping problem.

More than one-quarter of the kidnaped children were abducted by acquaintances, say David Finkelhor and Richard Ormrod, of the UNH Crimes Against Children Research Center. Their report, "Kidnaping of Juveniles: Patterns from NIBRS," was released this month by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

NIBRS is the National Incident-based Reporting System, a database which collects detailed information on crimes reported to police. Researchers say implementation of this new crime information system, which contains expanded information on kidnaping, provides an outstanding opportunity to learn more about the nature and extent of this crime.

"The media haven't given the public as clear a picture of acquaintance kidnaping as they have for strangers and family members," says Finkelhor, UNH professor of sociology. "But it is a serious part of the problem."

While ransom notes and the tragic recovery of bodies have molded the public's perception of the crime, in a strict legal sense, kidnaping occurs whenever a person is detained against his or her will. Kidnaping can be committed by babysitters, romantic partners and by parents who are involved in acrimonious custody battles.

The UNH study divides criminal kidnaping of juveniles into three broad categories and finds the following: kidnaping by a family member accounts for 49 percent of the incidents reported to police, kidnaping by an acquaintance (27 percent), and kidnaping by a stranger (24 percent).

The report describes acquaintance abductions as a combination of different crime scenarios. Some include teenage girls who are abducted by boyfriends or former boyfriends seeking revenge for rejection, trying to force reconciliation, or committing sexual assault. Other cases involve adolescents and teens abducted by acquaintances involved in gang activity who are trying to intimidate, retaliate, or even recruit them. Other incidents involve family friends or employees, such as babysitters, who may remove children from their home to sexually assault them or retaliate against the family.

The report also notes the following:

- While a serious problem, kidnaping makes up less than 2 percent of the violent crimes against children known to police.
- Most kidnaping of children, including stranger abduction, does not involve a weapon or result in injury or death to the victim.
- Up to age 12, children are more likely to be kidnaped by a family member. If a juvenile is kidnaped after age 12, the perpetrator will be an acquaintance about 71 percent of the time.

The full report "Kidnaping of Juveniles: Patterns from NIBRS" is available online at <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pubs/missing.html#181161>.

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