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Media Relations

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UNH Research Finds Child Kidnappings are Not Declining, But Fewer End in Murder

DURHAM, N.H. – Over the past decade, the number of children kidnapped by strangers and acquaintances has remained comparatively the same, however there was a significant decline in children killed by their abductors, according to new research from the University of New Hampshire’s Crimes against Children Research Center.

The report summarizes the results from the third National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children on abductions of children by strangers and slight acquaintances (called stereotypical kidnappings by the researchers).

Researchers from UNH’s CCRC and Rockville Institute compared the 2011 findings on stereotypical kidnappings with results from the second NISMART study (conducted in 1997) which consisted of data from police departments in more than 400 counties in the U.S.

The comparison showed that the estimated number of abductions of children remained virtually the same between the two surveys (115 in 1997 and 105 in 2011), However, in 2011, a smaller portion of these incidents ended in victim homicides (8 percent in 2011 versus 40 percent in 1997). Kidnappings involving 92 percent of child victims in 2011 ended in the recovery of the child alive, compared with 57 percent of victims in 1997. New technology, such as cell phones and the Internet, played a role in solving the crimes that involved two-thirds of the victims.

“Even though stereotypical kidnappings have not decreased, the good news here is that the likelihood of recovering children has increased and the number of stereotypical kidnappings that involve homicides has declined,” says David Finkelhor, director of the Crimes against Children Research Center and professor of sociology at UNH. “These optimistic changes may be related to improved law enforcement activity, better reporting and vigilance from families and the public, or even some changes in the motives and behaviors of the offenders.”

Roughly half of the victims, in both studies, were predominantly between the ages of 12 to 17, and about 81 percent were girls. Half of the stereotypical kidnappings in 2011 were primarily motivated by sex crimes. A small number entailed ransom or a desire to keep a child permanently.

The findings were released in the bulletin of the Office of Justice Programs’ Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) and can be viewed here; [Child Victims of Stereotypical Kidnappings Known to Law Enforcement in 2011](http://www.unh.edu/delete/news/releases/2016/06/rr16finkelhor.cfm.html).

OJP, headed by Assistant Attorney General Karol V. Mason, provides federal leadership in developing the nation's capacity to prevent and control crime, administer justice and assist victims. More information about OJP can be found at www.ojp.gov.

The [University of New Hampshire](#), founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 13,000 undergraduate and 2,500 graduate students.

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