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**PARENTAL ABDUCTION:
AN EXAMINATION OF
THE NATURE, PATTERNS AND CONSEQUENCES
FOR CANADIAN SOCIETY**

By: Jessie-Lynn MacDonald, B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of

Master of Arts

Department of Sociology/Anthropology

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
May, 1998
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The undersigned recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
and Research acceptance of the thesis

**Parental Abduction: An Examination of The Nature, Patterns and
Consequences for Canadian Society**

submitted by Jessie-Lynn MacDonald, B.A.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Thesis Supervisor

Chair, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Carleton University
May 14, 1998

ABSTRACT

Ninety percent of the 454 cases of abduction reported in 1996 were cases of parental abduction. Adopting a combined quantitative and qualitative approach, this study examined the nature, patterns and consequences of parental abduction for Canadian society. Research indicates that parental abduction is both a family and social problem. Findings indicate that the majority of abductors were male. Fathers were more likely to abduct after, and mothers before, a legal custody decision. The majority of abductors were born outside of Canada, and the majority of children were taken out of the country. Most of the abducted children were boys between two and six years old. Different beliefs, spite and/or frustration with a slow judicial process motivated abductions. Research indicates that parental abduction elicits a continuum of effects, ranging from emotional distress to physical and emotional neglect. This study was exploratory, and provides a foundation and recommendations for future research.

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Dedication

**This is dedicated to missing children and their families.
May the light of the angel help bring these children home.**

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INTRODUCTION

“To steal a child is not an act of love; it is an act of selfishness” (Tedisco and Paludi, 1996).

Research indicates that when children are abducted they are exposed to emotional, and in some cases physical and sexual harm (Abrahms, 1983; Finkelhor, 1990; Greif and Hegar, 1993). They are removed from their surroundings without warning and kept away from family members and friends. The abductor may change the child's appearance and name(s), and the child may be forced to live a life based on lies and deception. Parental abduction elicits a continuum of effects ranging from emotional trauma, to death. For example, Abrahms (1983) noted that some recovered children display signs of regressive behaviours such as bed-wetting, or increased aggression. She also noted that while on the run, some children were malnourished, kept out of school and lived in 'dismal' conditions (p.83).

Other researchers conclude that there are significant long-term emotional effects of abduction. For example, some recovered children are not able to form close relationships and/or develop trust with others (Schetky and Haller, 1983, Senior et. al. 1982). Furthermore, Tedisco and Paludi (1996) claim that *“unlike physical abuse and neglect of children, where evidence may be apparent, psychological problems of abductions are subtle and may not surface for some years”* (p.6).

Abduction also has consequences for the child's family. Family and friends left behind are often faced with feelings of grief, terror, a sense of loss, a sense of danger, and an overwhelming sense of fear of the unknown. Other individuals in the surrounding community respond with a mixture of panic, and anger. Often, the parent's initial

response is to contact the police. It is at this stage when the abductor's relationship with the child becomes important.

Typically, when a stranger abducts a child, panic spreads quickly throughout the community. Photographs of the abducted child often cover the front page of newspapers and appear as the headline story on the news. The police are quick to organise and start searching for the missing child. However, parental abduction is not conducive to such a reaction. If a parent abducts a child, the search does not usually begin immediately.

When a parent reports a case of parental abduction to the authorities, the priority is on custodial issues rather than on attempts to find the child. According to a reference manual for police investigations, in order to consider a case as parental abduction, the following steps must be addressed. First, determine whether or not a legal custody order exists, and if so, is the searching parent the custodial or access parent. Second, is their proof of 'intent' to deprive the other parent of access to the child? If there is no legal custody order, the searching parent may first have to obtain one before the case will be considered abduction.

If the abducting parent is the custodial parent, the decision to further investigate the case is then made by a Crown Attorney (Weiler et. al. 1993). This decision making process may delay the return of the child, in consequence, exacerbating the effects of the abduction. In consequence, these policies establish differentiation between the rights of custodial and non-custodial parents. Additionally, the access parent's right to maintain a relationship with the child, the right of the child to maintain a relationship with the non-custodial parent, are not considered as important as the rights of the custodial parent. In addition, these policies may perpetuate the parental abduction. When considering the

development of policies on abduction, one of the primary focuses should be on the effects that abduction has on children.

Research indicates that for abducted children and searching parents, parental abduction evokes similar emotional consequences as stranger abduction (Schetky and Haller, 1983; Tedisco and Paludi, 1996). However, parental and stranger abductions are viewed in different ways both by the legal system, and society as a whole. Parental abduction is not what many individuals would perceive as a social problem, especially not one that is a criminal offence, or a form of child abuse. For the purpose of this study parental abduction is “*the enticing, taking away, concealing, detaining, or harbouring of a child by one parent from the other*” (Sagatun and Barrett, 1990). It may occur during a marriage, separation prior to divorce, or years after a divorce. It also may occur in families where the parents never married.

The purpose of this study was to examine the nature and patterns of parental abduction. There are two primary objectives: first, to establish profiles of parents most likely to abduct, and of children most likely to be abducted; second, to examine the nature and consequences of parental abduction both at an individual and societal level; and through this, to situate parental abduction as a societal problem, rather than just a ‘family matter’.

Although this study is primarily exploratory in nature, throughout discussions two additional issues are addressed. First, should parental abduction be considered as a form of child abuse? Research indicates that regardless of the abductor's motive, being abducted is a distressful experience for children. Some researchers argue that in most cases of parental abduction, the rights of the child are neglected or ignored (Abrahms,

1983; Agopian, 1980; Greif and Hegar, 1993; Schetky and Haller, 1983; Senior et al., 1982). While the circumstances surrounding the abduction are paramount to understanding the problem, it is also necessary to address how parental abduction infringes upon the basic rights of the child.

In a discussion on the rights of the child, Khaki (1994) claims that: *“Children’s rights become the responsibility of parents and others to provide food, shelter, warmth and an emotionally stable, loving environment...the most instinctive, universal rights are the rights of physical and emotional protection”* (p.12). In a majority of parental abduction cases, the rights of the child are either ignored or neglected. Further supporting this premise, Senior et al. (1982) state that in cases of parental abduction *“the child’s best interest is rarely considered”* (p.579). A more detailed discussion on the rights of the child, and the relationship between parental abduction and the rights of the child is presented in chapter six.

The second issue addressed in this study is that even though in Canada parental abduction is a criminal offence, it is neither recognized nor enforced as such. Failing to identify parental abduction as an offence and impose punishment for such actions, further perpetuates the problem. For example, unhappy parents can take control over their own custody situation without suffering any type of legal ramifications. In family law, this type of action is referred to as ‘self help’ (Kronby, 1991: p.38). According to Abrahms,

“ironically, it is the legal system itself that has spawned child stealing, because it encourages, rather than discourages, this behaviour. Abducting parents who break the law are rarely caught or punished, while mothers and fathers who play by the book frequently lose out” (1983: p.88).

Treating parental abduction as both a societal problem, and a criminal offence, may help deter parents from abducting their children as a way of resolving conflict.

The exact prevalence of parental abduction in Canada is unknown. The RCMP Missing Children's Registry and Statistics Canada are the two primary mediums through which statistics on parental abduction are presented. Data for these statistics are collected through police reports. Due to data collection methods, both agencies are unable to report on the actual prevalence of parental abduction, in addition, they actually under-report the actual number of cases of parental abduction in Canada.

In 1996, the RCMP reported that there were four hundred and fifty-four abductions reported to the police in Canada. Ten percent (n=45) were cases of stranger abduction, while the remaining ninety percent (n=409) were cases of parental abduction (RCMP, 1997). These statistics report cases that were reported to the police, and fit the policy criteria to be considered as a case of a parental abduction. If these criteria are met, children are registered as 'missing' on a national database.

However, not all cases of abduction are reported to the police. Furthermore, the decision whether or not to proceed with an investigation of parental abduction lies with the Crown Attorney. In consequence, the actual number of children being abducted (particularly in the case of parental abduction where more than one child may be abducted), is higher than indicated. One of the subjects interviewed in this study is still fighting to get his son listed as a missing child on the police database. In this situation, on the day of the custody hearing, the mother took the child and left the country. Once in Florida, she obtained a custody order granting her custody. Currently, the whereabouts of the mother and son are unknown. The father has not seen his son in two years. Despite

repeated requests from the father, the local police department still refuses to register the child as missing. He stated that:

"Finding my son is the biggest hurdle I've ever faced, however, an equally difficult hurdle is getting help from the authorities. My wife took my son and disappeared, and the police have decided that because he is with his mother, that there is no cause for alarm...She has already been charged with neglect in Florida for leaving him alone one night while she went to her job in a strip club..she entered a plea of no contest and paid a fine of \$150.00" (Interview: Feb./98).

The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics also publishes data on parental abduction. It is difficult to determine the actual number of cases of parental abduction in their data, as they do not distinguish between 'attempted' and 'successful' abductions. Similar to the data collected by the RCMP Missing Children's Registry, data are collected through police reports. Therefore cases not reported to the police, or that do not fit the policy criteria, are not included in the data. In a recent publication on missing and abducted children, Statistics Canada reported an increase in the number of parental abduction cases. For example, in 1983 there were four hundred and nineteen reported cases of parental abduction, while in 1996, there were six hundred and two cases reported (Statistics Canada. 1997: p.8).

The prevalence of parental abduction can be estimated through statistics. However, these numbers cannot convey the devastating impact of parental abduction on abducted children, as well as family members left behind. This impact is so far reaching that the financial and social costs are impossible to calculate. The complexity of the problem of parental abduction overwhelms even those who have been working in the field for decades (Interview with investigator of missing children). The continuum of cases ranges from children missing for several hours to children never being recovered.

The continuum of child suffering ranges from slight emotional upset, to severe abuse and neglect. The death of an innocent child is the most detrimental outcome of parental abduction.

Parental abduction occurs as a result of a breakdown in family functioning, and the capacity of one or more family members to adequately resolve this family disruption. In cases of family conflict, parental abduction also reflects one of the ways in which children become the objects of adult manipulation.

One of the most dramatic changes over the past thirty years has been the increasing number of marriages ending in divorce. Although it is increasingly common, divorce remains a battle that produces 'winners' and 'losers'. Conflict arises over such things as the division of property and assets. However, more and more the issue of custody and access has become a major source of conflict. The change and adjustments faced by family members going through the process of divorce has given rise to a new form of family crime: parental abduction. If the conflict between the separating couple remains unresolved, or one parent is unhappy with the outcome of the divorce settlement, the chances increase that the child will become the victim of a parental abduction.

Chapter one presents discussions of the social characteristics of Canadian families, and a discussion on the outcomes and/or consequences of changing societal and family trends. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the relationship between parental abduction and changing social and family trends in Canada. Discussions focus on the cultural diversity of Canadian families, the increase in common-law relationships, divorce rates, and the subsequent increase in child custody disputes. A brief history of both changing marital trends, and custodial trends is presented. This chapter provides

support for the hypothesis that parental abduction has developed as a result of changes within the institution of the family, as well as other social institutions. For example, increasing divorce rates affect all family members, however, this change is also reflective of changing divorce laws, which are institutionally based. An examination of social changes surrounding parental abduction facilitates a deeper understanding of the motivational factors involved in parental abduction.

The first section of chapter two presents a summary of the literature on parental abduction. These studies reflect the various disciplinary perspectives from which parental abduction has been examined. The second section of chapter two presents a history of abduction. Additionally, the similarities and differences between stranger and parental abduction are examined. Statistics are provided on the prevalence of parental and stranger abduction in Canada.

Chapter three outlines the combined quantitative and qualitative methodological approach used in this study. The first section outlines the decision making process, the formulation of the survey questionnaire, the sample criteria, and the response rate. The second section outlines the sample, the interview, and a profile of the participants.

Chapter four presents findings from the survey questionnaire used in this study. These findings are compared with the findings from other research on parental abduction. One of the goals of this chapter is to determine circumstances in which a child is at risk for abduction. It also provides information required for the development, and implementation of policies and prevention and mediation measures. The second part of this chapter focuses on the issue of international abduction. Here similarities and differences between domestic and international abduction are highlighted. In addition,

the complexities of international abduction, differentiating between countries that are ratified with the Hague Convention, and those that are not is addressed.

Chapter five provides a summary discussion of the survey analysis, as well as the interview data. In addition, a discussion of the nature of parental abduction is presented. Chapter six presents a discussion of the impact of parental abduction on the individuals involved, and on society as a whole. This chapter concludes with recommendations for future research, as well as policy recommendations.

Chapter One: THE FAMILY, SOCIETY, AND PARENTAL ABDUCTION

Parental abduction stems from conflict within the family relationship. This conflict may be rooted in cultural or religious differences, or as a result of the dissolution of a family relationship. To understand parental abduction it is necessary to examine the family and social context in which it occurs. This chapter examines the social characteristics of Canadian family, as well as changing social and family trends which may precipitate or contribute to parental abduction. There are two objectives to these discussions: first to examine the nature of parental abduction within the family structure; second, to examine parental abduction as a societal problem.

The first section provides a discussion on the heterogeneity that exists in both Canadian society, and Canadian families. Next a discussion on changing family trends is presented. Here specific attention is given to the increase in common law relationships, and the increase in divorce and child custody disputes. The final section presents a discussion on the relationship between the changing social and family trends and parental abduction.

Parental abduction, which has been labelled by many as a 'private family matter', is also part of a greater political and social context. To maintain that parental abduction is merely a family problem is an injustice to the many children who are abducted by a parent. Furthermore, the consequence of defining abduction as a 'private family matter' conceals a social problem. Evidence of labelling social problems as 'family matters' has already been presented in family research with regards to the issue of domestic violence, which has only recently gained the recognition

it deserves. *“It is only in recent years that the incidence of family violence has caused people and governments to become pro-active about this serious problem”* (Payne and Payne. 1993: p.5).

According to C.Wright Mills (1959), the difference between private matters and public issues is that *“troubles are private when values cherished by an individual are felt by him to be threatened”* whereas, *“an issue is a public matter when some value cherished by publics are felt to be threatened”* (p.8). In this context, uprooting children from their surroundings without prior warning, concealing them from family members and friends left behind, and exposing them to potential emotional harm, poses a threat to ‘rights of the child’. According to Khaki, (1994) the rights of a child is said to be of primary importance in our society, as such, any imposition of their basic rights is a threat to society.

The argument that parental abduction as a social problem can also be considered using Fuller and Myers (1981) definition of a social problem. They define a social problem as:

“a condition which is defined by a considerable number of people as a deviation from some social norm...including the belief that these conditions can be eliminated or reduced through group and societal action, as well as the understanding that people have to be aware that the problem exists and that it threatens their basic values before it can be labelled a social problem and targeted for remedial measures” (p.100).

Using Fuller and Myers’ definition, parental abduction can be viewed as a social problem in the following ways: (1) kidnapping a child, and exposing him/her to potential emotional and in some cases physical harm, or neglect is considered a deviation

from the norm. (2) Parental abduction is an infringement on the basic rights of a child, as stated in the introduction, by Khaki (1994).

Integrating Fuller and Myers definition of a social problem with Mills' definition of a 'public issue' provides support that parental abduction should not be trivialized as a private family matter. Using children as pawns in a battle between parents is not considered to be the 'norm' in society today. Therefore, parental abduction should be treated as a social problem. Findings from this study provide support that the prevalence of parental abduction can be reduced through societal action.

Family researchers argue that the state tends to minimize or neglect issues which they consider to be 'private' or domestic issues, and in consequence, perpetuate the problem. For example, in their study of domestic violence, Gelles and Straus (1988) argue that "*the myth that violence and love do not coexist in families disguises a great irony about intimacy and violence*" (p.79). Additionally, current research indicates that the home should no longer be considered 'a safe haven' in which all members are protected from harm. In contrast, studies indicate that the home is where a large proportion of abuse, and violence occur (Lasch, 1977). Further supporting this, Khaki (1994) argues "*the attitude that families live in sanctified privacy is one which many people are convinced needs to be changed. Incidents of abuse are known to occur within the sanctity, and so it seems obvious that the attitude should be modified*" (p.16).

Previous research on parental abduction provide support for the argument that parental abduction is a social problem (Abrhams, 1983; Greif and Hegar, 1991, 1993; Sagatun and Barrett, 1990). A review of the literature indicates that parental abduction is a multi-dimensional problem that can be studied from a variety of dimensions and

disciplinary perspectives. Furthermore, it affects individuals from all social, cultural, economic, and religious classes. Greif and Hegar (1993) state that parental abduction, in all its complexity, must be situated in the context of cultural aspects, and social influences. They concluded that: *“Parental abduction is a family, social, and legal problem that cuts across many of our institutions, affecting young and old, rich and poor, and all racial and ethnic groups”* (p.4).

i) SOCIAL AND FAMILY TRENDS IN CANADIAN SOCIETY

No singular definition would adequately address the social characteristics of Canadian society. According to Nett (1993),

“In Canada, the political and geographical boundaries of the nation are clear enough, some question is raised about whether there is a distinctive national culture, or whether the patterns of life and shared ideals of most Canadians living within the boundaries are similar to those of other Western societies” (p.80).

Furthermore, the development of an official policy of multiculturalism, which encourages various ethnic groups to retain ethnic characteristics and institutions, has led many to question the legitimacy of speaking about ‘a’ Canadian culture (Nett, 1993). Rather, research indicates that Canada is a mosaic of different ethnic ancestry groups. Ethnicity is not just a label, it may also include a system of beliefs and values that govern people’s actions. Goyder (1990) defined ethnicity as *“a statistical category describing country of origin, or country of birth, but it also involves ideals and values. Ethnicity stimulates behaviour, which can be measured by the interaction between people”* (p.110).

As noted by McKie (1996), the ethnic make-up of the Canadian population varies considerably, in the 1986 census, one quarter of the population reported ethnic origins other than Canadian (p.4). As a result of the ethnic diversity that exists in Canada,

neither the family structure, nor society can be considered homogeneous. Family sociologists note that there is a tendency to believe that families are the same everywhere. However, because cultural groups tend to organize their family life differently depending on traditions, religious beliefs, and socioeconomic backgrounds, a singular definition would not adequately capture the diversity of Canadian families (Baker, 1996; Nett, 1993).

According to Nett (1993), there are cultural universals in the family institution such as marriage, motherhood and fatherhood. However, the family processes involved in these universal patterns take on various forms and meaning in different societies (p.89). Many immigrant families continue to practice their native customs and traditions, particularly with respect to socialization and child rearing. For example, Baker (1996) noted that immigrants living in Canada sometimes participate in arranged or semi-arranged marriages, a tradition from their native country. *“Some Middle Eastern and East Asian immigrants return to their home country to marry a partner selected by marriage brokers or family members still living there”* (p.7). This exemplifies the diversity that exists in Canadian families which should be acknowledged in family and social policies.

Greif and Hegar (1994) note that there is a gap in this area of research. Despite a history of professional interest in the impact of cultural differences within marriage (Baptiste, 1984; Jeter, 1982), Greif and Hegar noted that *“the question of how different cultural and ethnic backgrounds affecting parenting is yet to be explored thoroughly”* (p.135).

From the literature reviewed, research indicates that there are cultural differences in expectations concerning marriage and child rearing. A Swedish governmental report stated that:

“The clash between different cultures will lead to particularly serious strain in families where the husband and wife are from different linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. This may be the reason for the higher rate of divorce among immigrants than among native Swedes” (Working Party, 1986: p.5).

In a culturally diverse population, the chances of cross-cultural or interracial marriage increase. According to Greif and Hegar (1994), cultural differences may be a source of stress in marriages that cross racial, ethnic, or national lines (p.135). For example, these couples may have differences in styles of discipline and degrees of strictness, which may increase conflict, which in turn may result in divorce. In cases where one partner was born outside of Canada, once the relationship dissolves, s/he may choose to return to her/his native country. When there are children in the relationship, this poses an additional problem, in which parental abduction may be considered as an possible solution.

Research supports the hypothesis that there is a relationship between parental abduction and culture (Finkelhor et. al., 1990; Greif and Hegar, 1994). Greif and Hegar (1994) concluded that *“findings reveal a surprisingly high rate of interracial and cross-cultural marriage in families involved in parental kidnapping”* (p.135). Findings from the present study support this hypothesis. This relationship is further discussed in chapter four. Because parental abduction stems from family conflict research on the family, and parental abduction, must incorporate the culturally diverse families that exist in society today.

According to Baker (1990)

“Knowledge of cultural and historical variations in family structure and relationships may provide us with valuable insights about the relativity of family behaviours to a specific culture. These variations illustrate the importance of socialization and cultural values in influencing personal life” (p.1).

The cultural diversity of Canadian families is important in the investigation of parental abduction because it may provide possible explanations regarding conflict within the relationship that may precipitate abduction, as well as information about abductions motivated by different child-rearing or religious beliefs. Understanding these issues would facilitate the development of better prevention measures.

ii) CHANGES IN FAMILY STRUCTURE

In sociology, the family is considered as the basic social institution (Nett, 1993). According to Baker (1990), an institution is an organized aspect of social life in which various norms or rules establish and perpetuate behaviour and belief patterns, or a system of social norms (p.5). As such, the institution of the family is expected to perform the functional requirements needed to maintain both the family's and society's survival. In addition, the shared knowledge about family relationships, especially normative knowledge regarding standards of behaviour and ideals, or how people belong to families, how they ought to behave and what they have a right to expect from others, makes up the institution of the family (Baker, 1996).

These institutions are not static, they change constantly. For example, the norms of family behaviour are also influenced by external forces, in order to survive families

must adapt to these changes. According to Preston (1984), *“The transformation of family life has been so dramatic that to many researchers, it has seemed as if ‘an earthquake’ had shuddered through the institution of the family”* (p.37). Furthermore, in a diverse population such as Canada, it is difficult to maintain that the family is an institution, to such a collection of culturally diverse families, and in a constantly changing society.

While some of the previous literature supported the ‘nuclear family’ as the ideal or norm within Canadian society, modern research now acknowledges the variety of family types that exist (Baker, 1990; Nett, 1993; Skolnick and Skolnick, 1997). Broadly speaking, Baker (1994) defined the nuclear family as *“a husband and wife and their children sharing a residence, dividing their labour, and co-operating economically”* (p.4). While this definition did not account for alternative family types, historically, it may have been an adequate representation of a large number of families.

Current family researchers acknowledge that this definition is far from a true representation of families in Canada. For example, Baker (1990) noted that: *“there seems to be an increasing awareness that the nuclear family with mother at home and father at work is becoming a minority phenomenon”* (p.5). Nett (1993) claims that the media is partially responsible for increasing awareness about changing family structures, stating that:

“Television, radio, newspapers, and magazines have made Canadians quite aware that changes have taken place in the family life during the past several decades. The public is bombarded with statistics revealing more divorce, fewer births, more premarital pregnancies or children born to never-married mothers” (p.5).

To gain a deeper understanding of the family, and relationships within the family, research must address the changes, and incorporate the diversity, that exists in family life today. With regard to these changes Mandell and Duffy (1995) state that:

“In the past thirty years, Canadian family life has changed in profound and irrevocable ways. Married women have entered the paid labour force. Married men more often engage in domestic labour and child care as their partners’ involvement in the labour force has shifted the load somewhat more equitably between spouses...Divorce rates have risen, making divorce, not widowhood, the single largest precipitator of single-parent families” (p.1).

Changes in society affect the family. Currently in Canada, changing gender roles, increasing labour force participation for females, decreasing marital rates, increasing common-law and single parent families, and increasing divorce rates have had a significant impact on the family. Changing gender roles within the family, and the increase in labour force participation reflect the decline in the patriarchal system. The decrease in marital rates, and the increase in common law relationships, lone-parent families, and divorce rates reflect changing attitudes in society. These changes exemplify how the institution of the family is affected by changes within society as well as within the family.

Changes in both the family and society are rapid, these changes require that the family adjust. These adjustments sometimes elicit concern about the stability of family life, for example, the increasing divorce rate and decreasing birth rate may be interpreted as a decline in family relations. However, researchers argue that these changes reflect a transition rather than a decline (Baker, 1996; Nett, 1993; Skolnick and Skolnick, 1997).

Just as families need to adapt to changes in society, society also needs to adjust to changes within the family. According to C. Wright Mills (1959):

“Inside a marriage a man and woman may experience personal troubles, but when the divorce rate during the first four years of marriage is 250 out of 1000 attempts, this is an indication of a structural issue having to do with the institutions of marriage and the family and other institutions that bear upon them” (p.9).

In a rapidly changing society, the boundaries between private and public issues are less apparent than before. For example, problems such as domestic violence that was previously considered a private family issue, are now considered larger social problems. However, the role of the state within the sphere of the family is still ambiguous. Parental abduction reflects a social problem, in which there is a lack of social culpability. In consequence, it is trivialized as a private family issue.

Social policies need to be changed and new ones developed to address the changing family trends; especially if these changes affect children in our society. For example, there has been an increase in the number of common-law relationships. The increase in the number of common-law relationships has also brought forth changes in family trends. Payne and Payne (1993) define common-law relationships as *“two people who share their lives together but are not married to each other”* (p.13). As a consequence of the increase in common-law relationships there is a corresponding increase in children born out of marriage.

If a common-law union dissolves, child custody and access becomes an issue, at this point the increase in number of common-law relationships becomes relevant to the investigation of parental abduction. The majority of literature on parental abduction focused on divorced couples, with minimal reference to cases where the couples were still married, or living in a common-law union. This gap in the research literature provides support that further research is needed which incorporates cases of abduction which

occurred while the parents were still married or living common law at the time of the abduction.

Common-Law Relationships

More and more couples are choosing to live together without the legal ceremony of marriage, or as a trial period before marriage. Unmarried heterosexual cohabitation is more frequent today and the social stigma attached to it, has largely disappeared. It is estimated that ninety percent of reported cohabitation in Canada have begun since 1970. (Skolnick and Skolnick, 1997).

Between 1981 and 1991 the proportion of common-law relationships doubled from 357,000 to 726,000 (Barr, 1993). Baker (1996) notes the significance of this change, as she claims, “*the increase in the number of cohabiting couples is one of the most dramatic moral as well as demographic changes in the last twenty-five years*” (p.154). The general acceptance of common law arrangements signals a significant moral shift in society. The increase in common-law relationships has also resulted in an increase in children born outside of marriage. Lewin (1982) concluded that “*Quebec (and perhaps the rest of Canada) is on the same course as Sweden, where parenthood has long been almost as frequent among cohabiting as among married couples*” (p.770).

The increase in the number of couples opting for a common-law union as opposed to a legal one has brought about a new form of family relationship. Although not totally recognized as a legal union, policies are now being implemented to address this type of living arrangement. For example, Payne and Payne (1993) state that “*courts now recognize that cohabitational relationships may give rise to property rights as between cohabitants*” (p.15). This highlights how ‘private matters’ are shifting into the ‘public

domain'. However, the role of the state is still ambiguous, as stated by Payne and Payne (1993), "*there are many unresolved legal questions concerning the characterization of 'families' and the rights and obligations of family members*" (p.2).

Some researchers have found that common-law couples who later married, were less well adjusted in their first year of marriage. They reported higher levels of disagreement, and higher levels of divorce (Booth and Johnson, 1988; Thomson and Colella, 1992). Consistent with these assumptions, Baker (1996) noted the divorce rate was 30 to 39 percent higher for couples who had previously lived together (p.157).

The increase in the number of children born to common law couples raises both social and legal concerns. These concerns are further magnified if the relationship disintegrates, because there is no legal union to sever. The literature states that if there are children, and if the parents lived together after the child was born, the same legal criteria apply whether or not they are married to each other. However, Payne and Payne (1993) note that "*courts tend to grant custody of children to their mothers but grant liberal access privileges to unmarried fathers who played a significant role in the lives of their children before the parents separated*" (p.27). In this situation, unmarried fathers unhappy with this type of custodial arrangement may see abduction as a remedy.

The increase in cohabitation raises two concerns in the investigation of parental abduction. First, with the increase in common-law couples, it is likely that the number of children born into these relationships that have no legal grounding, will increase. If the relationship between these couples dissolves, custody becomes an issue. It has been the legal norm to award custody to mothers, granting fathers adequate visitation. However, the number of married fathers applying for custody has increased, therefore, a similar

trend may appear for unmarried fathers, if their attempts are unsuccessful, they may consider abduction as an option.

A second concern arises out of the increase in common-law relationships. Even if these couples marry, it has been suggested that this population has a higher rate of divorce. If this trend continues, it is possible that there will be an overall rise in divorce rates, and consequently, in child custody disputes. Parental abduction is the outcome in some cases of unresolved custody disputes. These issues provide support to the significance of incorporating the changing family in the investigation of parental abduction. The relationship between divorce, child custody disputes, and parental abduction is further discussed in the next section.

DIVORCE

“There are few who believe that the shift in attitudes and behaviour that have made divorce so commonplace is a temporary aberration or that we can return to some mythical time of greater marital stability.” (Baker. 1996: p.215).

Divorce is an emotional, legal and social process through which a marital relationship is dissolved. From a sociological perspective, divorce reflects a changing family trend. *“When a marriage collapses, problems arise, for the spouses, their children, and the community”* (Clayton: 1975. p. 489). When a divorcing couple has children, the relationship does not end with divorce, it changes. The relationship between divorce and parental abduction is significant, especially if the dissolution creates bitterness or malice between the parents.

Between 1928 and 1982, the number of divorces per 100,000 people in Canada rose from 55 to 280. In the past two decades the divorce rate has doubled from 1.4 per 1000 population to 2.8 (Statistics Canada: 1995a. p.6). Since the late 1960's, divorce

rates have increased dramatically. Fox argues that "*the rise in divorce rates in the last two decades ensures change and diversity in the organization of families*" (1988: p.2).

This sudden increase is due to revisions in the divorce legislation in 1968 which eased restriction on divorce. Additional changes were made in 1985, at which point there was another substantial increase in divorce rates. In 1987, the number of divorces increased to 362 per 100,000 population. This increase may be accredited to people who had delayed divorcing in 1984 or 1985 in anticipation of the new legislation. However, in 1989, the divorce rate dropped back to the 1986 level, at just under 300 divorces per 100,000 population and then fell a further 6% to 278 in 1992. (Statistics Canada: 1995b. p. 17).

These divorce rates are representative of the number of cases filed and the number of court hearings. They do not account for the dissolution of common-law relationships. Accordingly, the statistics on the number of 'families' that have experienced household changes is underestimated. It is important to address these changing trends, and the subsequent impact of divorce on the family, and on society. It is also important to incorporate these changes into policies and legislations.

Legislative changes to modernize existing divorce laws occurred in 1968, expanding the grounds for divorce. At this point, grounds for divorce included: a marital offence (including adultery, physical or mental cruelty), marriage breakdown, separation for not less than three years, or desertion. These changes allowed people to leave marriages that had long ceased to function. Further changes were implemented in 1985. At this point it became possible for a couple to obtain a divorce after one year of separation instead of three.

For many, the emotional effects of divorce are profound. Divorce leaves the individuals feeling sadness, fear, anxiety, anger, bitterness and/or euphoria. However, children are the ones most affected by divorce. Baker (1996) argues that “*children live their lives in the circumscribed world of the family, and divorce strikes at the very core of that world*” (p.220). In many cases of divorce the children get ‘lost’ in the battle between the parents. It is not unusual for children to bear the brunt of displaced aggression from the parents ranging from sarcastic remarks to unreasonable demands. All too often, children are subjected to parents vying for the affection and support of the child ‘for their side’. This unresolved conflict has tremendous emotional impact on the child.

Changes in legislation are indicative of changes within the family, as well as society's acceptance of these changes. The number of couples applying for divorce increased, thereby producing a mass of reconstituted, complex families. It was inevitable that custodial disputes also became an issue. Changes in family structures and policies also initiated the need for changes in the area of child custody.

CHILD CUSTODY

When a couple divorces, there may be negative consequences. The one most relevant to this paper is the issue of child custody. When a family relationship dissolves, the welfare of the children should be the most important issue between the parents. Sadly, in many cases, the children become the center of the battle. O’Neil (1994) highlights this arguing that “*each participant, including the child, holds a growing portfolio of rights to be invoked during periods of distress or dissolution*” (p. x). Further supporting this premise, Maccoby & Mnookin (1993) claim that divorce and child

custody disputes stand on the front line of the political and academic wars between the sexes (p. 91).

Just as there are family trends, there are custodial trends. Existing policies and legislations have been changed, and additional ones implemented to address what is best for the child. This may involve sole-custody, primary custody (with the noncustodial parents having specified visits), or joint custody. However, for a long period of time custodial trends reflected the dominance of a patriarchal society. In the nineteenth century, Canada inherited British Common Law and accepted the reasoning of the English courts

in awarding custody. *"Under the British Common law, men-husbands and fathers were the absolute and undisputed heads of the household. The father was considered the parent naturally endowed to have custody of the children"* (MacDonald, 1986: p.16).

In 1855, a legislation was passed in Canada that gave the court the discretion to award custody to a mother of children up to the age of twelve years old, where the judge saw fit. Then, the increased recognition of Freudian psychology and the concept of the mother's role in childhood development, influenced the belief that young children were better off with their mother. As such, during the period of 1933 to the middle 1970's, the criterion of 'tender years doctrine' guided judicial decisions, and consequently, mothers were the preferred custodial parent (Fox. 1988: p.481).

During that period fathers were not encouraged to apply for custody, and when they did, it was rare that custody was awarded to them. According to Maccoby and Mnookin (1993) these decisions were reflective of social norms rather than the law.

"Many fathers simply did not request custody; and a chief reason that custody was often ceded to mothers was simply that before divorce, mothers were the primary caretakers for their children. They worked fewer hours, made less money, and took more day-to-day responsibility for child care" (p.91).

In 1978, there was a notable change in society's values and beliefs, as well as laws concerning child custody. There was a shift in the criterion that guided judicial decisions from the 'tender years doctrine' to 'the best interest of the child'. Changing gender roles within the family as well as society contributed to the change. This change reflected the position that fathers are capable of providing both emotional and physical support necessary in child rearing. This change accompanied the passage of the Family Law Reform Act in Ontario, and remains the single standard in both federal and provincial legislation (Fox. 1988: p.481).

As a result of societal changes, and the judicial decisions changing to address the best interest of the child, an increasing number of fathers are petitioning for custody (Greif and Hegar, 1993). As a result of women's increased participation in the work-force, and the increase of male participation in household activities, men are now challenging the maternal preference in custody determinations. However, statistics indicate that mothers are still awarded custody in a majority of cases.

In 1985, an additional option was recognized in Section 16(4) of the Divorce Act (Fox. 1988: p.488). In adhering to the criterion of the 'best interest of the child' joint custody was included as an option. According to Fox:

"it is emphasized that children of divorced parents have a better prognosis when the custodial parent is emotionally stable, provides love and a structured life, and when the noncustodial parent maintains a regular relationship with the children and is supportive of the custodial parent" (p. 467).

Joint custody is becoming more recognized as a way of eliminating the adversarial approach to custody that made one parent the winner and the other the loser, however, for joint custody to be beneficial, both parents must put best interest of the child first.

In 1990, 27,367 divorces involving custody orders were granted under the 1985 Divorce Act. Of the 47,631 children affected, 73.3% were awarded to their mothers, 12.2% to fathers, and 14.3% to joint custody. These proportions indicate that joint custody was awarded in more cases than sole custody to fathers. Joint custody is gaining popularity. The proportion of children awarded to joint custody has increased 2.9% from 1988 (Statistics Canada. 1995a: p. 17).

The arrangement of joint physical custody, in which the child spends forty to sixty percent of their time with each parent, is said to work best for the child. However, the success of this arrangement depends largely on an amicable relationship between the two parents. Many people enduring divorce, find this set-up difficult. In support of joint custody, Greif and Hegar (1993) argue that "*In those healthier situations, parental interactions are based on the needs of the child rather than on either parent's need to exact an emotional toll from the other*" (p. 4).

This study examines the relationship between parental abduction and child custody. Conclusions from other studies suggest that a pattern can be established based on the type of custody awarded, and the gender of the abducting parent. The relationship between custody decisions and the gender of the abductor is further addressed in chapter four.

DISCUSSION

This chapter provides insight into some of the changes that have transformed what was once considered the traditional family. The traditional family of the husband as bread-winner, wife as nurturer, does not describe the diversity that exists in Canadian families (Baker, 1996). The institution of the family is never static, changes within the family are also reflective of changes in society. Gaining an understanding of changes in society and in the family helps to place parental abduction in perspective. Abduction is a complex problem that affects both the family and society. For this reason, parental abduction should not be trivialized as a 'private family matter', rather, it should be considered as a social problem.

These discussions provide support for the premise that changes within the family, such as the increase in common-law relationships, and the increase divorce rates, have the potential to increase the number of parental abductions in Canada. The increase in the number of common-law relationships is one way in which the family unit has changed in Canada. Lewin (1982) provided evidence to show that this has resulted in an increase in the number of children born out of marriage. Family and social policies have to incorporate these types of changing family trends to ensure that the needs and rights of children are protected.

Research suggests that policies are not current with respect to changing family trends. According to the literature, in most common-law relationships, mothers are awarded custody of the children (Kronby, 1991). However, unmarried fathers may follow the recent trend of married fathers, as discussed in the previous section, and petition for custody. If their petitions are declined as a result of the legal status of the

relationship, abduction may be considered as an alternative. As such, changing and developing policies to address custodial issues of children from common-law unions may help deter future abductions.

According to Khaki (1994), “*there exists a universal concern for the well being and formation of children in society*” (p.8). The family is responsible for ensuring that the best interest of the child is provided. However, if the family fails to fulfill the child’s basic rights, emotional and physical stability and protection, the responsibility shifts to the state. This highlights a joint responsibility between the family and the state, and further supports Mills’ (1959) argument that the boundaries between private family matters and public issues are not totally distinctive. Researchers argue that the state can no longer assume that the family is a ‘safe haven’ immune to abuse (Finkelhor et.al., 1995; Khaki, 1994). According to Khaki “*children’s rights are an integral, inextricable part of family issues. However, families are a corporate unit in society, and the social outcome of perpetuating traumatic family situations hardly needs to be elaborated upon*” (p.11).

Canadian society is composed of individuals and families from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. A large proportion of these immigrants maintain their native cultural values and traditions. However, with such a diverse population the chances of intercultural or interracial marriage increase. Research indicates that couples from different ethnic backgrounds, especially if their values and traditions are different, are more likely to experience conflict over gender roles, and child-rearing.

This conflict may be further magnified if the relationship dissolves. For example, coming from traditional patriarchal family structures to more liberal orientation in

Canada, conflict may increase over such issues as who 'owns' the children. According to Greif and Hegar (1994) *"differing assumptions about intimate relationships, and the upbringing of children may underlie marital dissolution, struggles over children, and consequently, child abduction by one parent"* (p.137).

The disintegration of intimate relationships, however troubled they may have been, shake people's foundations thoroughly. Perhaps those most affected by this disintegration are the children. If the separation is a hostile one, the likelihood of negative effects on the child significantly increases. Hostility between the parents increases conflict rather than co-operation. This hostility can have numerous, and even dangerous consequences for the child. As previously stated, one of these consequences is parental abduction. Greif and Hegar argue that if the dissolution of family relationships were amicable, the likelihood of parental abduction would decrease significantly.

"If separating parents were able to effect a smooth transition to a mutually satisfactory single-parent arrangement that included resolution of key emotional, custodial, and financial issues, the number of parental abduction cases would decrease" (Greif and Hegar. 1993: p.9).

The process of family change set in motion by marital disruption is overwhelming. Divorce is a complex issue that encompasses cultural, social, legal, economic and psychological implications. Researchers have found that separation and divorce places men, women, and children at risk for psychological and physical dysfunction (Chase-Lansdale & Hetherington, 1990). This study addresses parental abduction as a consequence of family dissolution. In a majority of divorces, mothers are awarded custody, while a small proportion of fathers are awarded sole, or joint custody. When custody is awarded to the father, the mother may feel inadequate, or be stigmatized

by society. In response to this, the mother may abduct her children. On the other hand, aware of custodial trends, the father who fears losing custody of his children, may remedy that situation by abducting them.

Regardless of the circumstances surrounding each case of parental abduction, the relationship between parental abduction and family dissolution is evident. The primary motivation for abduction is unresolved conflict within the family. There are two situations in which parental abduction occurs. The first occurs prior to the dissolution of the family, or during the present relationship between the searching parent, the abductor and the child[ren]. Usually in the latter situation, the child[ren] is taken without any warning to the other parent. In some cases, the relationship may have been an unhappy one, and the actions of the abductor were precipitated by this unhappiness. In such a situation, it is more likely that the abduction was premeditated, and that the searching parent had no inclination of the abducting parent's intentions.

The second occurs after the dissolution of the family. In this situation, the parents were both aware of the dissolution of the relationship. However, the decision to separate may not have been a joint one. When the decision to end the relationship was made by only one of the parties in the relationship, the individual unhappy with the dissolution of the relationship may abduct the child[ren] as a way of maintaining some sort of contact or relationship with the other parent. S/he may also abduct the child[ren] as a way of seeking revenge or to hurt the other parent. During this entire process, the parents have only a certain power, the balance of the power remains in the hands of the judicial system.

Abduction also occurs in cases where the termination of a family relationship is a joint decision. In these circumstances the individuals involved must decide on the custody and access of the child[ren]. Tension may arise when the parties involved disagree on the terms. In these situations, a legal custody order, whether interim or permanent, may or may not be in place. Parental abduction is complex in that many cases occur before the parties involved go through the court process, however, a large number of cases also occur years after a custodial order has been determined.

Regardless of the whether the relationship or family was intact prior to the abduction, family conflict remains a primary motivational factor in parental abduction. As such, it is necessary to examine the relationship between the family, family members and parental abduction. Agopian (1980) argues that *“as domestic relations become increasingly unstable, divorce and child custody decrees will be more frequently challenged, which should also increase the frequency of child thefts”* (p.25).

While most researchers situate parental abduction as a family problem, they also recognize that the scope of the problem goes beyond the family. Accordingly, Greif and Hegar argue that: *“Parental abduction is a family, social and legal problem that cuts across many of our institutions, affecting young and old, rich and poor, and all racial and ethnic groups”* (Greif and Hegar, 1993: p.4).

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the impact of familial and societal changes, as they relate to parental abduction. Research indicates that changing family trends initiate changes in society in the same manner that families are affected and change as a result of changes in society. The relationship between changes within the family and parental abduction are evident. However, there are also societal changes discussed in this

chapter that situate parental abduction in a larger structural framework. As such, in addition to the relationship between parental abduction and the family, the relationship between larger social issues and parental abduction must also be examined.

According to National Revenue Minister Jane Stewart, an abducted child is a missing child, and a missing child is a concern for everyone. In addressing the House of Commons she stated that “*the plight of missing children concerns every parent, every community, and every country*” (November 20, 1996). The next chapter presents a review of the literature, as well as an overview of abduction in Canada.

Chapter Two: AN OVERVIEW OF PARENTAL ABDUCTION

Parental abduction is a complex issue that affects many individuals, and crosses many disciplinary boundaries. Although parental abduction is an important social problem about which there is a growing multi-disciplinary literature, researchers acknowledge that little is known about the effects of this phenomenon (Finkelhor et. al., 1991; Greif and Hegar, 1991; Janvier et al., 1990). This section provides a review of the existing literature on parental abduction from a variety of disciplinary perspectives through which the problem has been examined.

A review of the existing studies on parental abduction provides a background knowledge about parental abduction, as well as information on how other researchers have approached, and conceptualized their research questions. The review revealed strengths and weaknesses in existing research, and where there were gaps in the research literature. The present study was designed to contribute to existing knowledge about parental abduction.

A review of the literature situates parental abduction as both a perplexing and disturbing problem, for both the individuals involved, and society as a whole. From a micro-level of analysis, research indicates that parental abduction negatively affects the lives of the individuals involved (Abrahms, 1983; Greif and Hegar, 1993). Children are removed suddenly from their surroundings, cut off from family and friends, and forced to live life on the run. According to Erica Tepstra, Netherlands' Secretary of State

"abducted children, forced to live in new surroundings, miss their family and friends left behind. The confrontation with the 'new world' contributes to an already emotional situation. It is - at least - very likely that they did not have much of a say in the matter of 'the move' itself" (In: Doek et al. 1996: p.22).

Similar to cases of stranger abduction, searching parents are filled with grief, anger and fear. Some know where their children are, some never find out. (Grief and Hegar, 1991; Senior et al., 1982; Sherman and Staff, 1993).

From a larger societal perspective, the studies examined provide support for the hypothesis that there is a relationship between parental abduction and a variety of social conditions. In many cases, members of the legal community and judicial system are involved with disputing families both prior to the abduction, as well as when (if) the children are recovered. Law enforcement agencies are involved in the search for the abducted children, as are non-profit organizations and government agencies such as the Department of Foreign Affairs. The latter is primarily involved in cases of international abduction. Although parental abduction has the characteristics of a societal 'problem', it does not yet have such recognition. The literature examined in this chapter will address both the private and public aspects of parental abduction, thereby providing a more universal view of this complex social issue.

There are different circumstances in which parental abductions occur.

Furthermore, the experiences of abducted children range from mildly unsettling, to murder. Therefore, as well as comparing across cases of abduction, the specifics of each case must also be addressed. Additionally, addressing the variation in the specifics of each case enables a better understanding of the nature and scope of this social problem.

There is a significant amount of variation in the treatment to which children are subjected to during an abduction. On one end of the spectrum, children may be treated fairly well, while on the other, children may be subjected to continual abuse (Abrahms, 1983; Greif and Hegar, 1993). The lack of social response to parental abduction cases perpetuates the common social perception that if children are abducted by a parent, they are not in any danger, and will not be exposed to any harm.

From a sociological perspective, studies on the effects of divorce on family members have focused on the development of problem behaviours, such as juvenile delinquency, subsequent to the marital dissolution (Hetherington et. al.1997). Research indicates that parental abduction may also contribute to similar outcomes. Abrahms (1983) concluded that *“one of the most severe long-term effects of being abducted is growing up with a distorted notion of love. Kids conclude that love gives people license to behave any way they want, including illegally, and immorally”* (p.78). If the act of abduction is understood as a social problem which occurs as a consequence of family dissolution, then it should be considered as a problem central to the sociology of the family.

As sociologists, we need to study how parental abduction affects the transition for individuals involved in family relationships. This study focuses on parental abduction as a consequence of family dissolution, and the consequences of parental abduction for satisfactory custodial outcomes. These investigations play a vital role in the development and implementation of family and social policies pertaining to child welfare and family dissolution.

i) PARENTAL ABDUCTION: SOCIAL FACTORS

The actual prevalence of parental abduction is not known. Researchers in two of the studies examined attempted to establish the incidence of parental abduction in the United States (Gelles, 1984; Finkelhor et. al., 1991). Both studies gathered their sample through a national telephone survey. This approach avoids the consistent bias seen in other studies on sensitive topics, whereby only those cases that are brought to the attention of the public are studied. As a result, the estimated incidence of parental abduction is based on a random sample of the whole population, rather than those who contact the police (Finkelhor, 1994), or missing children organizations (Greif and Hegar, 1991, 1993).

By focusing on a sample of the general population, Gelles (1984) tried to determine the incidence of parental abduction in the general community, as well as the community's awareness and possible effects of parental abduction on friends, family members, and the community at large. Of the population surveyed, 7% reported knowledge of a case involving parental child snatching. However, only 1.5% admitted to being personally involved in a case. Gelles then projected that after sampling error was taken into account there were between 459,000 and 751,000 cases of parental child abductions in the United States every year.

There are major limitations to this study. The survey instrument asked only four questions about parental abduction, permitting only minimal and very general conclusions about parental abduction. Also, the nature of the respondent's personal involvement in the reported case was not addressed. For example, if these respondents

were police officers, welfare workers or lawyers their experience with abduction would be quite different than individuals whose children were abducted, however, these responses would still be included in the calculation of the incidence of parental abduction. As such, these limitations increase the likelihood that the projected incidence of parental child snatching in this study is overestimated. According to Gelles, a precise measurement was not the goal of this study, rather, *"this estimate is only meant to be published as a guess of the problem"* (p.207).

Using a similar methodology as Gelles, Finkelhor and his colleagues (1991), concluded that using a national telephone survey approach provided support that the prevalence of parental abduction is underestimated. They argue that many cases are not included in police reports or court records. *"It has been suspected, and the survey confirmed, that many abductions do not come to the attention of the police or agencies...more than half of parental abduction cases do not get reported to get police"* (p.815).

In support of the premise that family issues are still treated as a private matter, these researchers concluded that parental abduction is still very much a silent problem in today's society. *"Like many family problems, including spousal violence, which sometimes comes to official attention, family abduction exists on a continuum, much of which is not publicly visible"* (p. 815). The relationship between parental abduction and social trends is also examined. Specific attention was given to divorce, the increase in contested custody orders, and changing social attitudes towards such things as common-law relationships. Finkelhor and his colleagues argue, as I do in this thesis that, if

parental abduction is affected by other social issues such as fear of, or unhappiness with custodial decisions, then it should be viewed as a social problem.

Other researchers have focused on the patterns and consequences of parental abduction (Agopian, 1980; Greif and Hegar, 1991, 1993). Agopian's sample was based on data gathered through ninety one district attorney files in Los Angeles. The sample criteria was limited to cases in which the child was taken from the custodial parent in violation of a custody decree. Greif and Hegar (1991) obtained a sample by mailing surveys to searching parents via missing children's organizations in the United States.

Agopian (1980) concluded that abductors were predominantly white, both male and female children were abducted in equal proportions, and that the average age of children being abducted was seven. In more than fifty percent of the cases he examined only one child was abducted. The majority of abductions occurred after a custody determination or divorce. Agopian concluded that the majority of the abductions were motivated by a desire to maintain a parent/child relationship, or as a means to maintain a relationship with the other parent. *"The primary motivation that leads fathers to engage in child-stealing appears to be their deep love for their child"* (p.95).

Studies that limit the sample criteria to cases in which the abduction was in violation of a custody order neglect a large proportion of parental abduction cases. Also limiting the sample criteria to cases in which the child was taken from the custodial parent neglects cases of abduction in which the custodial parent was the abductor. In consequence, the rights of non-custodial parents who are denied access to their children

are not considered.

In one of the only Canadian studies on parental abduction thus far, Swarren and Dalley (1993) gathered a sample of sixteen respondents through questionnaires mailed to searching parents, as well as face to face interviews. The authors concluded that the abducting parent was predominantly male, and between twenty-four to thirty-one years old. Of the sixteen cases examined, eleven of the children were between two and four years old. The conclusions made in this Canadian study bear a strong resemblance to the American studies reviewed indicating a similarity in cases of parental abduction existing in both countries.

The limitations of this study is that the sample is limited to cases of parental abduction in Ontario. However, the strength of this study is that it is one of the first studies on the profile of parental abduction based on Canadian data.

Greif and Hegar (1991) examined the impact of parental abduction on the family members left behind. Data were gathered through a questionnaire mailed to three hundred and seventy one searching parents. A majority of the respondents in their study were female (55%), supporting the stereotype that abductors are most likely to be male. At the time of the abduction, approximately half of the respondents had sole custody, while twenty-nine percent had joint custody. Three quarters of the abducted children were younger than six at the time of the abduction.

Greif and Hegar concluded that the abduction had a significant impact on the searching parent's emotional well-being. More than three quarters of the sample reported

feelings of *“loss, rage, and impaired sleep”*, while almost half reported *“severe depression”* (p.220). They concluded that: *“These parents experience one of the greatest losses imaginable, having their children taken from them, often without any preparation and frequently with no knowledge of the children's whereabouts”* (p.222).

In a follow up study, Greif and Hegar (1993) conducted telephone interviews with one-hundred and seventy-three of the searching parents who had responded to the questionnaire in their previous study. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents had found their children. The duration of these abductions ranged from less than a month to nine years, with a mean duration of one year.

One of the most significant findings from this second study was that the majority of recovered children (80%) were now living with the abductor or another relative. One possible explanation for this may be that the abducting parent may have been the custodial parent prior to the abduction. Another possible explanation could be that the duration of the abduction was lengthy enough for the child[ren] to bond with the abducting parent. In these cases, the judicial decision is based on the premise of ‘the best interest of the child’. As such, it may be decided that returning the child to the searching parent would cause further emotional stress to the child. In this way, the searching parent becomes victimized twice, first by the abductor and then by a judicial system that awards custody to the abducting parent. In consequence, the non-abducting parent may feel that re-abduction is their only option.

A similar pattern was found by Forehand et al. (1989), who reported that five of the seventeen children in their study were living with the former abductor. These

findings provide evidence that there is a need for follow-up research on parental abduction, and recovered children. In addition to providing information on what happens to recovered children, follow up studies could establish the long term impact of abduction on children. Furthermore, it would also be possible to establish what, if any, consequences abductors face upon the recovery of the child.

ii) PARENTAL ABDUCTION: PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

“Abductions involve a complete change in the children's way of life inasmuch as they were hidden, instructed to lie, isolated from peers, and subjected to frequent changes or residence” (Agopian, 1984: p.600).

Findings from studies reviewed indicate that the psychological impact of the abduction is pendant on the circumstances prior to, and the motivation for the abduction, as well as how the child was treated during the abduction. Research indicates that some recovered children display signs of regressive behaviour, such as bed-wetting, increased aggression, fear, anxiety and night terrors (Terr, 1983; Schetky and Haller, 1983; Senior et. al. 1982; Tedisco and Paludi 1996). Some parents of recovered children, as well as clinicians and researchers who have worked with recovered children argue that parental abduction should be considered a form of child abuse (Abrahms, 1983; Sagatun and Barrett, 1990; Senior et. Al. 1992; Schetky and Haller, 1983; Tedisco and Paludi, 1996).

There are mitigating factors which influence the impact of the abduction on children. According to Agopian (1984), and Greif and Hegar (1992), the duration of the abduction, and how the children are treated while ‘on the run’ have a significant impact on how the children are affected by the abduction. These researchers concluded that children who were missing for shorter periods of time, and were treated fairly well by the

abductor were 'less traumatized' by the experience. However, children who were missing for longer periods of time, and were not treated well, were 'deeply traumatized' by the experience.

Infants may not be immune to the emotional trauma of being abducted. Senior et al. (1982) presented a case study of a two year old child abducted by his mother. He was returned to his father and step mother after five weeks. Senior and his colleagues concluded that after one year of therapy, the child still displayed signs of depression and regression. This provides support that parental abduction evokes emotional distress in children. The recovered child's parents described his behaviour in the following way:

"He had severe difficulty falling asleep. Once asleep, he would frequently awaken; typically he was terrified and screaming. He refused food and had lost several pounds. He urinated and defecated on the floor and had developed a marked aversion to the toilet" (p.580).

This case study also addressed how other family members are affected by abduction. For example, it was noted that *"much of the early work involved dealing with the stepmother's anxiety about the child's condition. She described in detail, her feelings of sadness and helplessness following the abduction"* (p.580). In this way, other family members have to deal with a multitude of emotions; first, the impact of the initial abduction and then if the child is recovered, the after-effects of the abduction.

In another study addressing the emotional impact of abduction on the family members left behind, Sherman and Staff (1993), focused on crisis, stages of grief and symptoms of post traumatic stress (p.2). The sample for their study consisted of five searching parents whose children were abducted and were subsequently found or returned. Data were gathered through a questionnaire, and then face-to-face interviews.

Of the five participants, two were male and three female. All of the respondents were separated at the time of the abduction.

They concluded that the abduction left the searching parents feeling “*a loss of control, despair, and powerlessness*” (p.43). The respondents indicated that the support received from other parents whose children were abducted was most helpful. This would suggest that there is a need to provide a more formal network for parents who have their children abducted. The researchers concluded that parental abduction has a significant interpersonal impact upon the non-abducting parent.

There are several limitations of this study. First, the sample consists of parents who had legal custody of the children. Consequently, their recommendations also focus on custodial parents. In consequence, the perspective of parents who did not have legal custody of their children, or parents who were still married at the time of the abduction, are not included. Furthermore, the sample was gathered based on the geographical proximity to the researchers. These sample criteria are limitations for this study. However, as one of the only Canadian studies it provides a framework for future research.

Through interviews with recovered children, Tedisco and Paludi (1996) concluded that, “*children often live under cruel circumstances, almost paralleling the life of a fugitive, with frequent changes of residences, and names*” (p.12). In this respect, children abducted by a parent, similar to those abducted by strangers, lose trust in their world and feel emotionally abandoned by their parents, who are most important to their protection and recovery.

This is the only study in which evidence of sexual abuse of abducted children was

provided. Tedisco and Paludi concluded that when abducted children are sexually abused, they are further manipulated into silence, both about the abduction and then about the sexual abuse. Furthermore, *"If children do disclose information about the incestuous relationship, they are typically met with disbelief and rationalization of the perpetrator's behaviour. Thus, most children do not tell"* (p.12).

When children are taken out of the country they are exposed to additional emotional trauma, specifically when they are forced to live in a different culture (Greif and Hegar, 1994). Ironically, these children are removed from the country illegally, which in any other circumstance would be considered, and treated as a hostage taking situation. However, the law does not situate abducted children in the same light. Because custody is viewed mainly as a family issue, or as one of the long term effects of divorce, child abduction is trivialized and legal action delayed. This further perpetuates parental abduction as a private family matter rather than a social problem.

Some abducted children are further traumatized by a re-abduction, either by the same parent, or abducted back by the searching parent. Research indicates that some children are exposed to multiple abductions (Sagatun and Barrett, 1990; Livingstone, 1992). In Sagatun and Barrett's sample (1990), five of the forty-three cases were multiple abduction. Livingstone noted that in many cases of international abduction, the only means the searching parent has for recovering their children is to re-abduct them. As with the original abduction experience, the child is once again exposed to 'life on the run', and the trauma that accompanies such a lifestyle.

The literature reviewed indicates that the experience of abduction may be

emotionally distressing for children. Some researchers have noted only minimal psychological consequences for abducted children (Agopian, 1984; Greif and Hegar, 1992), while others have concluded that the emotional impact of abduction can take months, even years to surface (Abrahms, 1983; Senior et. al., 1982,; Tedisco and Paludi, 1996). The impact of abduction requires further research. Findings from these studies provide support that parental abduction is emotionally distressing for children, and family members. Yet as will be shown in this study, the legal status of abductors is often muted. They are rarely treated as criminals and are often rewarded for their acts with legal custody of their children.

Greif and Hegar (1992) note that there is a need for research on the long term impact of parental abduction. *"Whereas a great deal of attention has been focused on the consequences for children of divorce, minimal attention has been given to the effects of parental abduction on children"* (p.599). After interviewing recovered children, Abrahms (1983) concluded that they do not forget the experience of abduction. One recovered child stated that *"stolen children are scarred children. They don't forget. You are never all right again. I still have daily nightmares about my abduction"* (p.83).

iii) PARENTAL ABDUCTION: THE LEGAL SYSTEM (American Literature)

Although it is considered as a criminal offence, parental abduction is rarely treated as such. Researchers that have examined the relationship between parental abduction and the law have concluded that for the most part, parental abduction is regarded as a 'family matter' (Finkelhor et. al., 1991; Gill, 1981; Greif and Hegar, 1993; Sagatun and Barrett, 1990). However, other social institutions play a role in parental

abduction cases. As Sagatun and Barrett (1990) concluded “*Child abduction can call forth a plethora of activities from three judicial systems: the criminal, the family or domestic courts, and the juvenile courts*” (p.434). Yet, this apparent confusion over judicial territory creates inaction in the resolution of parental abduction cases.

Research indicates that members of the law enforcement and legal communities view parental abduction as a family matter (Finkelhor et. Al., 1995; Gill, 1981; Schetky and Haller, 1983). Gill (1981) interviewed searching parents, lawyers, psychologists, members of the police force, and children. He concluded that authorities are unwilling to become involved in what they regard as a ‘family matter’. His study highlights how imprecise the law is when dealing with parental abduction. Further supporting these findings, Schetky and Haller’s study (1983) concluded that a common hurdle for many searching parents is that if the child is abducted by a parent, the action is rarely seen as a criminal offence. “*The criminal statutes have frequently not been applicable, thus the parent who had lost a child had to pursue the child without the assistance of the legal system*” (p.280). All but one of the subjects interviewed for the present study shared similar frustrations.

Finkelhor et al. (1995) examined the role of police who respond to family abduction episodes. Only forty percent of the sample contacted the police immediately, the remaining respondents contacted a lawyer, or sought assistance from elsewhere. Of this forty percent, Finkelhor and his colleagues concluded that a large number of the respondents (62%) reported being either ‘somewhat’ or ‘very’ dissatisfied with how the police handled their case.

These researchers noted that there are several possible explanations as to why parents would not be satisfied with the police response to their case. For example, the dissatisfaction may be rooted in the legal definition of parental abduction. In some states, it is not considered parental abduction if a parent has legal custody of the child[ren]. Therefore, parents who had visitation rights, or were still married at the time of the abduction are faced with a lot of red-tape prior to their case being considered a case of 'parental abduction'. Legally, the police cannot take action until the courts decide upon parent child status.

Finkelhor and his colleagues argued that stranger abduction is given much more attention and treated with greater severity than parental abduction. *"Police tend to view family abductions as essentially civil cases that do not require their intervention. This view is reinforced by the belief on the part of police that because the child is with a parent or other relative, s/he is not at risk to harm"* (p.207). Findings from these studies indicated that parental abduction is not regarded as a social problem. Failure to recognize the severity and impact of parental abduction facilitates the misconception that it is a 'family matter'.

Finkelhor and his colleagues raised several significant issues that have been pursued in the present study. First, the findings provide support that not all parents contact the police when their children are abducted, thereby, further supporting the argument that statistics based on police reports may underestimate the actual prevalence of parental abduction. Second, it supports the premise that non-criminal family crises are much more likely to involve the police, and the subsequent problem that police do not

treat family crimes as seriously as they do similar offences involving non-family persons.

iv) PARENTAL ABDUCTION: CULTURAL FACTORS

The research literature indicated that there is a relationship between culture and parental abduction, specifically with regards to the abductor's motivation for abducting, as well as the issue of children being taken out of the country. It has also been noted that married couples from different ethnic backgrounds may experience more conflict and in consequence, may be more likely to dissolve a relationship (Agopian, 1980; Greif and Hegar, 1994).

Agopian (1980) concluded that there was a somewhat higher-than-expected rate of interracial marriage in his sample. In further support of this, Greif and Hegar (1994) noted a higher number of parental abductions from couples from interracial marriages compared with couples who married within their own culture. *"Our study of parent abduction revealed surprisingly high rates of interracial and cross-cultural or international marriage in the families involved in parental kidnapping"* (p.135).

Greif and Hegar examined the importance of different assumptions about relationships and child rearing that may have an impact of marital dissolution, with the consequence of parental abduction. They concluded that interracial marriages were more likely to have a history of domestic violence. Furthermore, couples from interracial/interethnic marriages are more likely to experience stress produced by lack of acceptance, different role expectations, and differences in child rearing expectations.

Accordingly, these researchers note, “*Individuals usually maintain some of the cultural beliefs and behaviours even if they become accustomed to other cultures they are exposed to or living in*” (p.136). For this reason cultural diversity must be addressed in the investigation of parental abduction, specifically in respect to possible motivations that precipitated the abduction.

Greif and Hegar concluded that in these cases abductions are likely to be motivated by the desire to stay involved in the child’s life, or “*to maintain patterns of child care that have cultural meaning for them*” (p. 139). Furthermore, “*the proportion of international abductions is dramatically higher for both interracial/ethnic and cross-cultural marriages than for others*” (p.140). These conclusions highlight the need to examine the various aspects and challenges of intercultural marriages, as well as the importance of addressing the interdisciplinary aspects of parental abduction. This will help determine the relationship between parental abduction and culture.

v) PARENTAL ABDUCTION: INTERNATIONAL CASES OF ABDUCTION

Similar to the present study, Janvier et. al. (1990) gathered their sample via a survey sent out to members of a missing children’s organization in the United States. They concluded male abductors are more likely to remain in the country, while female abductors are more likely to take the children and leave the country. Furthermore, domestic cases are more likely to be resolved than international cases. A possible explanation for this is that the country to which the child is taken may be the birthplace of

the abducting parent. This reveals both the legal complexities involved when parents take abducted children across international borders as well as the influence of racial and ethnic differences on the perpetration and resolution of abduction cases.

Searching parents claim that there is a lack of awareness and response when children are taken out of the country. For example, after her husband abducted her children and fled to Iran, McKeon (1993) claimed that:

“International parental kidnapping causes enormous emotional pain for both the abducted child and the parent deprived of rightful custody. The lack of response from the law enforcement agencies to which parents turn compounds the pain and creates a sense of helplessness which undermines respect for the law” (p.236).

Similar statements were made from respondents in the present study, both in cases of domestic and international abduction. In reference to international abduction, McKeon highlights the financial and emotional costs to the searching parents, as well as the risks to children. In a majority of cases, the recovery of children who are abducted and taken abroad, is more difficult and costly than cases where children are kept in their native country. Once again, the words of the author are similar to that of other searching parents. *“As a left-behind parent, I have been frustrated by the difficulty in finding practitioners, prosecutors, and judges who are informed”* (p.241).

The problem of abduction is further compounded when children are taken out of the country. In their study of international abduction Greif and Hegar (1994) concluded that, *“there is the possibility that with the impending changes in the European Community, including the removal of some impediments to inter-country passage and employment, parental kidnapping may increase”* (p.296). Searching parents face

additional obstacles when their children are taken out of the country, in some cases the recovery of a missing child is almost impossible. Chapter five and six discuss the social and legal barriers of searching for children in other countries.

vi) THE ABDUCTING PARENT

Incorporating a variety of perspectives is a strength for sociological studies. Gaining insight into the abductor's perspectives is imperative to the investigation of parental abduction as it facilitates a deeper understanding of the problem. Without the abductor's perspective, there is a piece of the puzzle missing. Supporting this position, McCracken (1988) states that: *"Every social scientific study is improved by a clearer understanding of the beliefs and experiences of all the actors in question"* (p.9). As such, an examination of the abductor's perspective provides a better understanding of the possible circumstances that motivate abduction. This is important when addressing possible prevention measures for parental abduction.

As previously stated, the voice of the abducting parent is almost non-existent. Researchers have noted the difficulty in locating and making contact with searching parents, however, gaining access to abducting parents has been proven to be even more difficult (Abrahms, 1983; Greif and Hegar, 1994). *"Abductors, after the location and return of children, have been difficult to find and often refuse requests to be interviewed"* (Greif and Hegar, 1994: p.283). In only two of the studies reviewed, researchers were able to make contact with and interview abducting parents.

Abrahms (1983) interviewed a number of abducting parents (she does not include the exact number). While some abducting parents justified their actions as their duty because they felt that their children were in danger, they did not acknowledge the harm being done to their children. Abrahms notes that *"All rationalize, many agonize. However they delude themselves, parents abduct with little understanding of child development"* (p.123). In addition, she noted that some of the abducting parents she interviewed seemed to be 'unstable' and 'disturbed' (p.142). It may be that an abducting parent is emotionally unstable prior to the dissolution of the relationship and the unstable relationship brings forth the emotional turmoil leading to abduction.

According to Abrahms, *"A person with a history of emotional disturbance makes an immature and often violent partner and parent. The stresses of a broken or failing marriage can push that bitter grownup over the edge...leading to abduction"* (p.148). For this reason the emotional and physical safety of the child become minimized and the goal of total possession takes precedence. She concluded that the majority of abductors were not thinking of the best interest of the child. Rather, a majority of the abductions were motivated by spite.

In agreement with Abrahms, other researchers support the argument that the motive for abducting children is largely based on the self centered perspective of the abductor. (Finkelhor, 1991; Greif and Hegar, 1991; Senior et al., 1982). Under these circumstances children are used as pawns, or negotiating chips between the two parents. While this is true for a lot of cases, Abrahms also recognizes that other abductions are motivated by what she terms as 'defeat'. Fed-up with the slow process of the court

system, or unhappy with the custodial or visitation agreements, parents take matters into their own hands. As one abducting parent reported to Abrahms, *"Stealing my kids was the only way. I tried to go through the courts and it didn't work"* (p.133). When a parent is not allowed to parent, s/he may feel compelled to kidnap, thereby ensuring a sense of power in an otherwise powerless position.

With the increase in divorce rates, and changing custodial trends, more fathers are applying for and being awarded sole or joint custody of their children. Consequently, this has led to a notable increase in female abductors. Abrahms concluded that many females abduct out of anger, embarrassment, and a sense of entitlement to their children. *"If women lost their children, they must have done something to make the judge think that she was incapable of taking care of the kids"* (p.141). Gender roles are deeply embedded within our societal beliefs. Many believe that women are inherently 'nurturers' and thus the best parent to raise the child. By taking the child, the woman ensures her role as a 'good' mother in spite of a court system that may deem otherwise.

As previously stated, abduction is a complicated phenomenon. Abrahms (1983) noted that in a majority of cases she examined, there seemed to be multiple motives for the abduction. *"Snatchers may grab out of love and out of spite, to help their children and to hurt their spouses"* (p.143). Consequently, the abductor's mental and emotional state may appear to be rational, however, the perceived motivations or justifications for abduction are not. Thus, an abductor may claim to abduct out of 'love' for their child, but in reality, take action in defiance of a legal system that they cannot dissuade.

Greif and Hegar (1994) interviewed seventeen abducting parents; nine males, and

eight females. The respondents ranged in age from twenty to fifty years old. Data were gathered through telephone and face-to-face interviews. Greif and Hegar stated that:

“An important focus of clinical work with abductors who are in hiding, or those who have resolved their situation, is to ascertain the abductor’s perspective” (p.287). The duration of the abductions varied from one week to eleven years, with the average duration of two years. At the time of the abduction, eight of the seventeen abductors did not have custody, seven had joint custody, and one had sole custody, the other child had been in foster care at the time of the abduction.

According to Greif and Hegar, the motives for the abductions varied. Two thirds of the abductors reported that they were not satisfied with the court system or professionals involved in their cases. Half of the respondents in this sub-group claimed that the children were being abused, neglected, or subjected to psychological neglect. The other half reported they felt the custody decision was unfair.

Consistent with Abrahams’ (1983) findings, these researchers concluded that there are usually multiple motivational factors involved in parental abduction. *“The reasons for abduction tend to revolve around fear for the child’s safety, unhappiness with the court decision concerning custody and visitation, reaction to the other parents abduction threats and actions, and anger”* (p.287). This quote reveals the multidimensional factors involved in parental abduction, both at the individual and societal level.

In both these studies the small sample size limits the generalizability of the

findings. However, the major strength of these studies is the unique voice and perspective that is seldom heard. Learning more about the abductor's motives facilitates a better understanding of the problem. This knowledge will benefit with the implementation of prevention and intervention measures. Thus, although my study does not address the abductor's perspective, it also calls for future research to incorporate the abductors perspective in order to gain a deeper understanding of the problem.

vii) PARENTAL ABDUCTION: ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF RECOVERY

A common theme throughout the literature is that the likelihood of recovering a child significantly decreases if they are taken out of the country. (Finkelhor, 1991; Greif and Hegar: 1993). In cases of international abduction, the searching parent is faced with the limited resources of their government. Rescue attempts are further complicated when the country to which the child has been taken has not ratified with the Hague Convention, which facilitates the return of children to their native country. In such cases, parents have very few options to aid in the return of their abducted children. Some of these parents hire private specialists to help them recover their children. However, searching parents without adequate financial resources must rely on government agencies who view the abduction as a 'case study' rather than a personal, family trauma (Interview: Dec/97).

Livingstone (1992) presents four case studies in which searching parents hired 'Ex-Delta Commandos' to help find and return their children. He states that "*many children are being held hostage in foreign countries. Virtually all are pawns in custody disputes involving one parent of one nationality and one of another*" (p.95). These cases provide insight into the emotional turmoil that searching parents go through in their

attempts to recover their children. Readers also gain insight into the emotional and physical turmoil children go through while caught up in the battles of abduction. Once again, children become pawns in a battle involving individual family and social/legal institutions.

In each of the cases, the searching parents were female, and the abducting parents were male. In three of the four cases the abductors were foreign students studying in the United States. Furthermore, each of these three mothers had requested that the judge withhold the father's passport until a final custody order had been made, and each of these requests was denied. Consequently, their children were abducted. One child was taken to Tunisia, another to Jordan, another to Bangladesh, and two children were taken to Ecuador. As such, legal institutions failed to identify or legitimize the parent's fear of abduction, thereby inadvertently assisting in the act.

In three of the four cases, a combination of gender issues and cultural traditions prevailed in deterring the mothers from having their children returned from the country to which their children were taken. Jordan, Tunisia and Bangladesh are patriarchal societies in which fathers are almost always granted custody of their children, regardless of the circumstances surrounding the abduction, the mother received very little, if any support from the government and officials abroad.

In each of these cases, the mother exhausted all other avenues to find her children, and as a last resort hired private specialists. This book allows the public to see what is involved for the searching parent, and abducted children when children are taken abroad. It also highlights the lack of local government support each of the women in these cases

received from their own country. Finally, the author parallels the relationship between abducted children, with that of other 'hostages' that have been recovered abroad.

However, Livingstone argues that hostage situations would solicit more concern, and attention.

These case studies highlights two important issues. First, searching parents will go to drastic measures to recover their children. Second, all of the mothers in these cases suspected that the parent would attempt to abduct their children, and requested assistance from the judicial system. Assistance was denied, and consequently, the children were abducted. If such requests were taken seriously, measures could be taken to prevent the abduction.

DISCUSSION

These studies provide a preliminary understanding as to the depth of parental abduction. It affects family members at the individual levels, as well as society as a whole. Although society tends to regard it as such, parental abduction is not just a family matter. Although the problem begins with the dissolution of a family relationship, when a child is abducted, the problem evolves into a larger, more complex issue. In support of this, Agopian (1981) concluded that parental abduction takes place within the larger structural framework of society, and is thus a societal problem. Specifically he claims that "*Besides the role imperatives involved in the genesis of child-stealing occurrences, there also are structural conditions that play into the behaviour*" (p. xiv).

These studies present a variety of perspectives through which parental abduction have been examined. The findings from the studies by Gelles (1984) and Finkelhor et. al.

(1991) provide support for the argument that the prevalence of parental abduction cannot be determined solely by police reports, or court records as these statistics are representative of reported cases of abduction. In consequence, the prevalence of parental abduction reaches deeper than recognized by statistics.

Agopian (1980) and Greif and Hegar (1991, 1993) presented findings of patterns of parental abduction in the United States. Some researchers conclude that males and females tend to abduct in equal proportions, others suggest that males abduct more than females. While it appears that fathers are more likely to abduct than mothers, this may be a consequence of custodial trends and/or cultural influences. Males tend to abduct prior to custodial decisions, and females after.

The majority of children abducted are between two and nine years old. Children less than two are less likely to be abducted as they require more attention and care, while children older than nine may be harder to abduct or handle after the abduction (Agopian, 1980; Finkelhor, 1991; Greif and Hegar, 1991, 1993, 1994).

Research indicates that there two mitigating factors on the impact of parental abduction on children are: the duration of the abduction, and how the children are treated while on the run. Shorter durations, and better treatment minimize the negative effects of the abduction on children, while longer durations and maltreatment contribute to an already traumatic experience (Agopian, 1980; Greif and Hegar, 1993). Case studies and interviews with recovered children indicated that most children display regressive behaviours upon their return (Schetky and Haller, 1983; Senior et. al. 1982).

Researchers who examined the relationship between parental abduction and the law conclude that parental abduction is still treated as a 'domestic or civil' matter. Furthermore, most law enforcement agencies tend to avoid becoming involved in these cases (Finkelhor et. al. 1995; Greif and Hegar, 1993). This highlights the debate between private and public issues. Treating parental abduction as a family matter rather than a social problem contributes to the difficulty of managing and resolving these cases.

Studies indicated that international abduction cases are more difficult to resolve than cases of domestic abduction. Furthermore, the circumstances of the relationship prior to the abduction may differ from those of domestic cases. Rather than spite, these parents may be motivated by religious or cultural influences (Agopian, 1980; Greif and Hegar, 1994). The number of international abduction cases are increasing therefore, there is a need to address these issues in research.

As previously stated, a common goal in the examination of parental abduction is to situate the problem within a larger societal framework, as well as to establish measures of prevention and intervention. The studies conducted by Greif and Hegar (1991, 1992, 1993, 1994) cross many disciplinary boundaries to support the variety of issues that studies in the area of parental abduction must address. Above all else, these researchers conclude that parental abduction goes beyond the pain of the individuals involved. It also takes place in a societal context that is shaped by changing family patterns, public perceptions of abductions by parents and a legal system that attempts to prevent and resolve abductions (Greif and Hegar: 1993. p. vii).

Limitations in the Literature

Researchers who study parental abduction note that it is difficult to obtain large samples of families or individuals who have been through the experience of an abduction.

There are only limited avenues available to find out the names or locations of searching or abducting parents. Some parents who have recovered their children move in order to avoid a re-occurrence of the abduction, while other parents decline invitations to participate in studies because they do not want to re-live the experience. Because this population is difficult to reach, existing studies provide insight that may not otherwise be available. These studies also provide a foundation for future studies on parental abduction.

An additional weakness noted in the literature arises from the lack of consistency in both the sample criteria and methods used to gather data. Because of such methodological issues, caution must be exercised when comparing conclusions, or making overall generalizations to the larger population. For example, there were only a few studies reviewed that operationalized parental abduction in the same way, or that had the same sample criteria.

Few studies used the same method for gathering a sample, or for gathering data. While some studies may focus on the experiences of the searching parent (Abrahms, 1983; Finkelhor, 1991; Gill, 1981; Greif and Hegar, 1991, 1993, 1994; Janvier et al. 1990), others consider the abductor's experiences (Abrahms, 1983; Greif and Hegar, 1994)). Other researchers base their conclusions on official documents, such as police or

court records (Agopian, 1981; Sagatun and Barrett, 1990). Attempts should be made to address these limitations in future studies of parental abduction.

A major gap in research on parental abduction is the missing voice of the abducting parent. As such, the experiences of searching parents dominate research on parental abduction. Researchers that have been able to examine this issue from the abducting parent's perspective concluded that finding, and interviewing abductors is a difficult task. Some are living on the run, with no fixed address, while others fear negative ramifications from their involvement in studies (Greif and Hegar, 1994).

The absence of the abductor's voice is problematic in several ways. For example, studies provide explanations about the abductor's motives, however, in most cases, these conclusions are based on subjective opinions of the searching parents. Additionally, the abductor's perception of the circumstances which precipitated the abduction may differ from the searching parent's perception. In order to fully understand parental abduction, all perspectives must be considered. The absence of the abductor's voice represents a gap in existing literature on parental abduction, and attempts should be made to reconcile this absence in future research.

There are two cited Canadian studies on parental abduction (Sherman and Staff, 1993; Swarren and Dalley, 1994). Both of these studies were based on parental abduction in Ontario, and examine cases where there was an existing custody order in effect. To the best of my knowledge, there are not studies that address parental abduction from a national perspective. Some of the limitations found in these two studies have been addressed in the present study. For example, the sample criteria for this study

encompasses all circumstances of parental abduction, including cases in which the couple were still married, never married, where there was a legal custody order in effect, as well as cases where no custodial order existed. The major strength is that this sample was gathered on a national, rather than provincial scale.

Throughout this study the rights and best interest of the child will remain at the forefront. Because there has been minimal research done on parental abduction in Canada, it is first necessary to situate the issue of parental abduction as a problem that requires attention and action. As research indicates, parental abduction is a problem that should not be silenced under the pretense of domestic or civil disputes (Abrhams, 1983; Greif and Hegar, 1992, 1993). Little is known about parental abduction in Canada. The next section provides an overview of abduction in Canada.

II: AN OVERVIEW OF PARENTAL ABDUCTION

“When little Katie Brosseau went with her father for a scheduled visit, her mother expected her back in a few days. Katie’s parents were separated. Her father decided that he could not live without his daughter, and that he would not allow someone else to raise her. The police believe he drowned his 2-year old daughter, before killing himself” (Victims of Violence, 1994: p.1).

This section presents a history of abduction, as well as a discussion on the similarities and differences between parental and stranger abduction. First the history of abduction is discussed. Special attention is given to several cases of stranger abduction which brought the issue of abduction in general to the forefront. Then, the similarities between parental and stranger abduction are presented.

These discussions provide support to the hypothesis that stranger abduction is

treated as a serious issue, and is considered as a social problem, while parental abduction is not. This may be because stranger abduction does not stem from unresolved family issues. In contrast, parental abduction stems from unresolved conflict within the family, and is thus regarded as a 'private family matter'. The purpose of these discussions is to facilitate a better understanding of parental abduction; with the goal of situating parental abduction as a social problem.

Contrary to the common myth that if a child is with a parent they are safe, research indicates that many children who are abducted by a parent are neglected, moved around, and in some cases abused. (Abrahms, 1983; Greif and Hegar, 1993). In an interview with Abrahms (1983), a child named Ray shared the following:

"I was abducted from my Mom when I was three years old. My father took me to live with his brother. I didn't live with my father. He didn't say why – I don't think he really wanted me. I used to think about my Mommy a lot. I asked my father to help me find her, but he wouldn't do anything. I went to different schools. I was hit many times with a belt by my uncle and not fed meals the right way. When my birthdays came, nobody celebrated them. I was forgotten. The time I was away was the loneliest and worst of my life" (p.15).

Ray was missing for seven years. This case provides support that in some cases, parental abduction leaves both emotional and in some cases physical scars. Increasing awareness about the potential ramifications of parental abduction should facilitate more public concern about parental abduction. Parental abduction has attained only minimal attention by society. Both as a family problem, and as a societal problem, it is virtually ignored. This is largely a result of treating parental abduction as a family, rather than a social problem.

Parental abduction is a social problem. In most cases, abduction occurs as a

consequence of family conflict or dissolution, a social trend that has been recognized by many family researchers (Baker, 1990; Mandell and Duffy, 1995; Skolnick and Skolnick, 1997). Additionally, although it is not widely enforced as such, parental abduction is a criminal offence. Laws are implemented to discourage rather than encourage negative behaviour. However, failure to enforce consequences for parental abduction further perpetuates the problem.

i) HISTORY OF ABDUCTION

Both stranger and parental abductions are not recent phenomena. In the past, however, abductions were referred to as kidnappings or snatchings. In fact, stories of parental abduction are present in a variety of literary tales such as the bible, mythology, and Shakespeare. For example, in a classical Greek myth 'Apollo', 'Apollo' fathers a son out of wedlock, and arranges for the son to be abducted before the child's mother carries out her intentions to kill the child. In Shakespeare's tale, an uncle abducts two young princesses from their mother. (Greif and Hegar: 1993). As part of the mythology of everyday life, abduction, whether stranger or parental, is an integral part of our culture.

In the late 1800s, The New York Times started publishing stories of both parental and stranger abduction. For example, they printed an article about a father who was falsely accused by his father-in-law of trying to abduct his children (1875: p.1). Three years later, the story of a divorced mother who was accused of abducting her child was published (Divorced Wife's Theft. 1878: p.1). This period was heavily influenced by patriarchal beliefs, whereby fathers were automatically granted custody of the children by the court (Greif and Hegar, 1993; p.4). As such, there appears to be a converse

relationship between the gender of the abductor, and custodial trends, in which the parent who is least likely to be given custody is the most likely to abduct.

During the 1800s, it was because of the media that kidnapping (abduction) gained public attention. Currently, the media still remains one of the primary avenues through which the public learns about cases of stranger abduction. It is primarily through cases of stranger abduction in the United States that abduction gained attention as a social problem. Furthermore, several of these publicized cases initiated changes in the public's perception of abduction. Publicizing personal details of these cases also facilitated the initiation, and implementation of legal statutes making abduction a criminal offence, as well as the subsequent formation of missing children's organizations. In this way, personal family problems were transformed into social issues involving the large memberships of society.

In 1932, the twenty-month old Lindberg baby was abducted and held for \$50,000 ransom. Although the family paid the ransom, their son was never returned. The body was found that same year and Bruno Hauptmann was convicted and executed for the murder. The Lindberg case was influential in the implementation of laws pertaining to child abduction in the United States.

Lindberg was a national hero who touched the lives of the American public. As such, individual American citizens identified with and became personally involved with this case. The Lindberg baby became 'their' baby making them all feel vulnerable; for example, if it could happen to him, what about their children. The public reaction was startling. Following this incident, stranger abduction (kidnapping) was made a federal

offence - with a lifetime sentence. This case also initiated the Federal Kidnapping Act (1932), and influenced the foundation of the American Federal Bureau of Investigation (Greif and Hegar, 1993: p.6) .

Fifty years later, similar circumstances initiated changes in the public perception of abduction in Canada. On April 21, 1981, sixteen year-old Daryn Rosenfeldt was abducted, raped and murdered. Three weeks later, his body was found on the banks of the Fraser River in Vancouver. The man responsible for his murder was the infamous Clifford Olsen, also known as the "candyman killer". Olsen had ninety-four previous criminal convictions, and was later convicted for the murders of eleven children.

The victim's parents, Gary and Sharon Rosenfeldt felt that the issue of missing children required more attention, and in the spring of 1984 formally founded the Victims of Violence Canadian Centre for Missing Children. The impact of the Rosenfeldt abduction was widespread. Similar to the Lindbergh case, it led to the implementation of new laws dealing with child abduction (Victims of Violence, 1994).

The Rosenfeldt case of stranger abduction increased awareness of abduction throughout Canada. Many people felt the impact of this horrendous crime. Similar to the Lindbergh case, the public's reaction to the crime led to the implementation of new policies and laws pertaining to abduction. Once again, a private act perpetuated on an individual became a public issue later defined as a social problem. It also initiated the founding of one of the most significant non-profit organizations. Organizations such as Victims of Violence, Child Find, and the Missing Children's Society of Canada have become a primary tool for searching parents.

This historical review, albeit brief, provides examples of how specific cases of abduction have influenced society's perception, and public policies pertaining to abduction. Although most of the cases discussed are cases of stranger abduction, these cases have been the most influential in modification or implementation of policies and are largely responsible for gaining public recognition about abduction. The next section presents a discussion on the similarities and differences between parental and stranger abduction.

ii) COMPARING STRANGER AND PARENTAL ABDUCTION

"Social Scientists probing the long term implications of child stealing claim that it can be far more traumatic for kids to be grabbed by parents than strangers, from the point of view of trust. It is unfortunate, though more acceptable, for a stranger to steal" (Tedisco and Paludi, 1996: p.81).

Contrary to popular belief, in comparison with parental abduction, the occurrence of stranger abduction in Canada is relatively low. One reason for this misconception, is that stranger abduction tends to receive more publicity. Again this highlights the stereotype of the family as a 'haven' and a private sphere. As stated, stranger abduction is also more likely to be treated as a serious criminal offence whereas parental abduction is not. If a child is abducted by a stranger, and the abductor is caught, s/he is likely to receive a maximum prison sentence. The opposite is true for cases of parental abduction. There are no figures available on the number of criminal convictions as a result of parental abduction. The lack of available information on the rate of criminal convictions as a result of parental abduction indicates a need for further research.

Cases of stranger abduction receive more public attention, which perpetuates the misconception that, stranger abductions are more prevalent than parental abductions.

From a sociological perspective, this indicates that there is greater concern when abduction is considered a 'public' issue, rather than a 'private' family matter. However, in Canada, the proportion of stranger abduction compared to the proportion of parental abduction is relatively low. For example, The RCMP annual report (1997) indicated that in 1996, there were four hundred and fifty-four reported cases of abduction. Ten percent of which were stranger abductions, while ninety percent were parental abductions (p.4).

In comparison to the statistics released from the RCMP, The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics report a higher number of abductions, but a lower proportion of parental abduction cases. A problem with these statistics is that attempted abductions are also included, in consequence, it is not possible to determine the actual prevalence of abduction. For example, a recently published Juristat indicates that there were nine hundred and sixty-four abductions in 1996: six-hundred and two (62%) were cases of parental abduction, while three-hundred and sixty two were non-parental abductions (Statistics Canada, 1997: p.8).

These figures indicate that the prevalence of parental abduction in Canada is much higher than that of stranger abduction. Additionally, these statistics do not include all cases of parental abduction, these figures represent the cases that are reported to the police. Evidence will be presented in this study to support Finkelhor's (1991) argument that a large number of cases are not included in police records. In consequence, statistics provided by the RCMP Missing Children's Registry, and Statistics Canada underestimate the actual prevalence of parental abduction.

Society regards stranger abduction as a serious social problem. It is argued

throughout this thesis that parental abduction is also a serious social problem and should be treated as such. The following discussion on the similarities between parental and stranger abduction provides support that parental abduction invokes similar types of emotional harm and in some cases similar physical risks, as stranger abduction. However, due to the sacrosanct image of the family, these effects of parental abduction become ambiguously defined and lose their impact as negative outcomes for children.

Table one provides a breakdown of abductions in Canada from 1991 to 1996. Parental abduction accounts for approximately 85 -90% of all abductions.

Table One: COMPARISON OF ABDUCTION CASES

YEAR	TOTAL	PARENTAL	STRANGER
1991	490	412 (84%)	78 (16%)
1992	448	378 (84%)	70 (16%)
1993	468	407 (87%)	61 (13%)
1994	462	394 (85%)	68 (15%)
1995	422	354 (84%)	68 (16%)
1996	454	409 (90%)	45 (10%)

Source: RCMP Missing Children's Registry Annual Report 1997.

Table two provides statistics from the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, which includes both attempted and successful abductions for the period of 1983 to 1996. These figures differ from those released by the RCMP. One possible explanation for the differences is due to the incorporation of attempted abductions in their figures shown in table two. Because the number of abductions includes attempted abductions, it is difficult to determine the actual rates being reported.

Table Two: PARENTAL VERSUS STRANGER ABDUCTION

YEAR	TOTAL	PARENTAL	STRANGER
1983	701	419	282
1984	824	486	338
1985	910	506	404
1986	892	555	337
1987	967	596	371
1988	1,059	641	418
1989	1,002	577	425
1990	1,046	625	421
1991	1,095	601	494
1992	1,220	705	515
1993	1,204	689	515
1994	1,129	656	473
1995	1,035	619	416
1996	964	602	362

Source: Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada.

These figures indicate that there has been a moderate increase in the number of total abductions from 1983 to 1996. The number of parental abductions increased from 1983 to 1992, and has decreased slightly between 1993 to 1996.

As stated in the previous section, the most apparent similarity between stranger and parental abduction is that children are the helpless victims. Furthermore, in both cases, there are family members left behind who suffer. Whether the abductor was a stranger or a family member, the family usually engages in an in-depth search for the abducted child(ren). Regardless of the type of abduction, children suffer both physical and emotional consequences. However, the type of abduction poses different types of effects on the child. These effects will be addressed here.

According to the literature examined, there are two prevailing types of stranger

abduction.

“The majority involve the abduction of females in the pre-to mid-teens, usually for sexual purposes. The second type is ‘baby snatching’, in which infants are abducted either for illegal adoptions or by a childless woman or couple seeking a child of their own” (Weiler et. al., 1993: p.23).

Parental abduction typically involves children, predominantly between the ages of two and twelve years old, and motivations varies from revenge against the spouse to fear of losing contact with the child through the legal system.

One of the most significant differences between parental and stranger abduction lies with the motivation for taking the children. Weiler and his colleagues (1993) classified abduction into five categories:

“Those that occur for domestic relations reasons; those that result in hostage situations; those motivated by intended rape or other sexual abuse; those that accompany non-sexual assault or murder; and those that are motivated by the possibility for ransom” (Greif and Hegar, 1993: p.5).

The motivation differs between the first and the latter four categories.

The impact of the abduction on child(ren) is largely dependent on the relationship between the child and the abductor, and the motivation for the abduction. For example, a child is more likely to be physically or sexually abused in cases of stranger abduction rather than in cases of parental abduction. Furthermore, the chances of children experiencing severe physical harm or death are more likely in cases of stranger abduction. However, research indicates that both parental and stranger abduction cause emotional trauma to children.

The search process differs between the two types of abduction. As previously stated, stranger abductions tend to be more widely publicized. For example, if a child is abducted by a stranger, the media is quick to report the case to the public. In contrast, it

is rare for cases of parental abduction to make the headlines and when they do, it is usually in cases of international abduction. In most cases of stranger abduction, the search process begins immediately and includes the support of the family, the community, the authorities, and any other available sources. Whereas, in the cases of parental abduction, the type of custodial order in place needs to be determined before authorities can investigate the case. Therefore, the searching parent must be in possession of, or obtain legal documents that specify that s/he has rightful custody of the abducted child[ren].

Table three presents a breakdown of four hundred and nine cases of parental abduction reported in 1996 for each province and the two territories.

Table Three: PROFILE BY PROVINCE- Cases Entered on Police File

TYPE	YT/NWT	BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	PQ	NB	PE	NS	NFLD
PARENTAL	3	63	41	15	7	197	74	4	0	4	1
	.7%	15%	10%	4%	2%	48%	18%	1%	0	1%	.2%

Sources: RCMP 1996 Annual Report
RCMP Missing Children's Registry

The prevalence of parental abduction is significantly higher in Ontario than in any other province or territory. Of the 409 cases of parental abduction reported in 1996, forty-eight percent (197) were from Ontario. Quebec and British Columbia also had higher proportions of abduction than the other provinces. The two territories, and Newfoundland had less than one percent of the total proportion, and Prince Edward Island had none. Further research is required to determine why the prevalence of parental

abduction in Ontario is so high compared with other provinces.

Table four provides a breakdown of the proportion of parental abduction cases in Ontario as compared with the rest of Canada from 1983 to 1996.

Table Four: NUMBER of PARENTAL ABDUCTIONS/CANADA and ONTARIO

YEAR	CANADA	ONTARIO	PROPORTION
1983	400	N/A	N/A
1985	N/A	158	N/A
1991	412	179	(43%)
1992	378	164	(43%)
1993	407	177	(43%)
1994	394	173	(44%)
1995	354	168	(47%)
1996	409	197	(48%)

Source: RCMP Missing Children's Registry Annual Report 1994, 1996.

The data from this table indicate that during the period from 1983 to 1996, the number of parental abductions in Canada has remained relatively stable. However, in Ontario, the number of cases has increased slightly each year. The highest number of abductions in Canada occurred in 1991 (412). The highest number of abductions in Ontario occurred in 1996 (197), and the lowest in 1985 (158).

Discussion

The conflict between familial, social and individual forces that give rise to parental abduction have a significant impact on all the individuals involved, specifically for those at the center of the conflict; the children. Research indicates that the trauma children experience through abduction and through life 'on the run' is difficult to understand, perhaps more so for younger children. Some researchers argue that an abduction by a parent has the potential to affect children's self-perception, their academic

success, the way children approach future relationships, as well as how happy they are with their life in general (Abrahms, 1983). In support of this view Greif and Hegar (1993) concluded,

"Out of all the events that stress a family, parental abduction is one of the most disruptive...For the parent left behind, feelings of rage, loss, anxiety, and helplessness are common. For the child, life on the run means moving from one house to the next, avoiding close ties with anyone, and hearing distortions about the other parent. To the abductor, frequently an anguished and desperate parent, the abduction seems the only way to right a perceived wrong, to recapture the affections of the other parent, to get revenge, or to hold on to someone dear" (p.3).

Searching parents not only deal with the loss of a child, but also the dissolution of a relationship. Knowing that the child is with the other parent is usually of little comfort. In most cases searching parents don't know where their child is, what type of care they are getting, and they have to live with constant fear that they may never see their child[ren] again. Supporting this position. Greif and Hegar (1993) concluded that:

"The children of these searching parents have been missing for periods of time ranging from a few weeks to many years. These mothers and fathers being cut off from their children, not knowing their whereabouts, doubting their well-being, fearing their children have been turned against them – have experienced any parent's worst nightmare" (p.vi)

In addition to emotional turmoil, in a large proportion of cases the lives of the searching parents change dramatically. For example, some give up their jobs, while others have to work additional jobs to pay for the costs incurred from the search, or to pay for lawyers. Searching for a child can cost a tremendous amount of money.

In some cases searching parents have found their missing child[ren], but were not able to regain custody of them. This may be because the child has formed a bond with the abductor, or become accustomed to a new environment. These judicial decisions are

based on the premise of 'the best interest of the child'. Thus, in addition to the emotional and physical cost of searching for the lost child, parents in these circumstances have to deal with the devastating end result of losing custody of their child[ren]. In some parental abduction cases, the children are never recovered.

While the range of suffering is broad, it is important to acknowledge how parental abduction has the potential to put children at tremendous emotional and physical risk. Further research on the effects of abduction on children is necessary. Research and policy development into parental abduction is scarce at best. Parental abduction highlights complex family dynamics, as well as multi-faceted social and legal issues. At the very least, parental abduction causes disruption in a child's life, and grief to family members left behind.

It is unfortunate that, like many other 'family problems', the statistical data presented to the public regarding parental abduction are based on reported cases. Therefore, the actual prevalence of the issue may be oppressed. Researchers have acknowledged that some individuals report the abduction to their lawyers rather than to the police. In Canada, estimates of parental abduction cases are based on the number of cases reported to the police. Thus, cases in which parents chose to contact their lawyers rather than the police, are not included. Further research is needed to establish the relationship between cases of parental abduction reported to the police, and the actual prevalence of parental abduction in Canada. This section has provided a review of existing literature on parental abduction. A majority of the studies reviewed were done in the United States. Because research on parental abduction in Canada is limited, these

studies provide a foundation for future Canadian research. The next chapter outlines the methodology used in this study.

Chapter Three: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the decision making process and methodological issues involved in the two-tiered approach used in this study. First, the objectives of the study are presented. Following this, an outline of the quantitative approach used in this study is presented. This includes details of the questionnaire design, the pretest, the sample criteria and how the sample was gathered. The next section discusses the response rate, and the advantages and disadvantages of mail surveys. The final section of this chapter outlines the qualitative approach used in this study. Information is provided on the participants interviewed, the interview structure and format, and the advantages, and disadvantages of using interviews.

The focus of this study is based on quantitative data. However, the data gathered through interviews are used to provide additional information to the data gathered through surveys. The benefits of supplementing quantitative data with qualitative data, and the importance of both approaches are discussed.

There were two primary objectives to this study. The first was to establish profiles of parents most likely to abduct their children, and the children most likely to be abducted. These profiles were developed through a review of cases of parental abduction in Canada. The second objective was to examine the nature and consequences of parental abduction, both on an individual and societal level. Addressing these objectives will facilitate the development and implementation of prevention measures to minimize the risk of future abductions, and intervention measures that may be used to aid in the

recovery of abducted children. To attain both of these objectives, a two-tiered approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods, was used.

Using a quantitative approach, the first part of this study examines parental abduction within the larger framework of society. This analysis is based on parental abduction at the national level, and situates parental abduction as a current problem in Canadian society. To attain the first objective of this study, a mail survey was conducted. Through an analysis of the surveys, profiles of parents most likely to abduct, and children most likely to be abducted were established. Similarities and differences between cases of parental abduction were examined, as was information pertaining to when abductions are more likely to occur. This type of knowledge is valuable because it provides a better understanding of a phenomenon we know very little about. Furthermore, it will aid in the implementation of appropriate mediation and prevention measures.

To address the second objective of this study, face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted. This process facilitated a deeper understanding of the experiences of people who have been, or are currently involved in, a parental abduction case. This micro-level of analysis presents the opportunity to learn more about how abduction has affected the lives of the family members involved. In cases where children were recovered, the interviews were also used to examine how families cope with the aftermath of an abduction. This approach provided a voice to individuals whose experiences have rarely, or never been heard. As such, their stories will also aid in the development of prevention and mediation programs, a major goal of this study.

Concerning the methodology of this study, some social scientists argue that one must choose either a quantitative or qualitative approach, and remain consistent throughout the study (Derksen and Gartell, 1992; Levine, 1993). However, others argue that there are many benefits to a combined approach (Campbell, 1974; Denzin, 1970; Reichardt and Cook, 1979). I do not agree that quantitative and qualitative approaches are mutually exclusive as some might argue. Additionally, both perspectives are useful methodological devices. Combining the two is important for this study because it allows for a more extensive investigation into the nature and patterns of parental abduction.

In support of this type of methodological marriage, Howard Becker states, *"Practitioners of qualitative and quantitative methods may seem to have different philosophies of science, but they really just work in different situations and ask different questions. The politics of social science can seduce us into magnifying the differences. But it needn't and shouldn't"* (In: Jessor. 1996: p.65). Further supporting this view, Glaser and Strauss (1967) argue: *"There is no fundamental clash between the purposes and capacities of qualitative and quantitative methods or data...We believe that each form of data is useful for both verification and generation of theory"* (p.17).

There are a variety of benefits gained through integrating the two approaches, rather than situating them as two distinctive methods. For example, Greene et al. (1989) argue that the two approaches are complimentary, such that *"overlapping and different facets of a phenomenon may emerge...they also provide initiation, wherein contradictions and fresh perspectives emerge...finally they allow for expansion, wherein the mixed methods add scope and breadth to a study"* (p.257).

Consistent with these assertions, Reichardt and Cook (1979) argue that *“far from being antagonists, the two types of knowing are complimentary...By bringing the methods together, these two separate stores of knowledge and experiences can cross-fertilize. Perhaps new sources of bias will be discovered through their use together”* (p.24).

Qualitative and quantitative approaches are never substitutes for one another. I believe that the benefits of each approach is conducive to the desired outcome, or purpose of the research. Researchers such as Reichardt and Cook (1979) state that *“there is nothing to stop the researcher, except perhaps tradition, from mixing and matching the attributes from the two perspectives to achieve that combination which is most appropriate for the research problem and setting at hand”* (p.18). Intergrating the two approaches is not only possible, but will yield richer, and more detailed data. (Campbell, 1974; Denzin, 1970; Hagood, 1977; Reichardt and Cook, 1979; Romkens, 1997).

With regards to the present study, a combined approach was most favourable to attain the objectives set forth. While quantitative methodologies highlight the proportions showing the prevalence of parental abduction, and enhance the generalizability of the study, the qualitative approach allows for rich details to be captured, as well as a more subjective understanding of the problem. This is of particular importance in the present study because to my knowledge, such an approach has not been used in the investigation of parental abduction in Canada.

As noted in the previous chapter, parental abduction is a personal issue, in that it stems from conflict between two parents. However, it transforms into a social issue when the law is broken, and more importantly, the rights of a child are ignored. As such, the

qualitative approach permits an exploration of patterns that will help establish the profile of abducting parents, and of children most likely to be abducted. The qualitative approach provides data that can be used to gain a deeper understanding of what people experience when their children are abducted.

A combined approach has been used by a variety of researchers, in a variety of disciplines. (Hagood, 1977; Holstein, 1995; Reinhartz, 1992). To further examine domestic violence, Murphy and O'Leary (1994) combined the two approaches and concluded that:

"the combined rigor of qualitative methods, designed to uncover subjective perspectives and social context in the creation of theories, and traditional quantitative methods, designed to evaluate the accuracy of claims through the canon of deductive logic, may produce the most worthy understanding of phenomena like spousal abuse" (p.219).

Other studies of parental abduction have combined both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Both Greif and Hegar (1991), and Janvier et. al. (1991), approached their research by way of surveys, as well as interviews. Combining these two approaches allowed the researchers to provide conclusions based on a larger sample population, and then capture the information not available through surveys, as well as to gain internal validity for the statistical patterns uncovered in the surveys through interviews.

I) QUANTITATIVE APPROACH

As previously stated, the purpose of this study was to gain insight into, and better understand, the prevalence of parental abduction in Canada. The methodology used in

the present study is similar to a study done by Grief and Hegar (1991) conducted in the United States. These researchers mailed surveys to parents whose children had been abducted by the other parent. To gain access to parents whose children had been abducted, these researchers contacted at least one missing children's organization in every state. Questionnaires were then mailed out to parents via organizations that agreed to participate.

The methodology for the present study differs slightly in that every missing children organization in Canada was invited to participate in this study, compared to the Greif and Hegar (1991) study where only one organization in each state was invited to participate. I chose to contact every organization in order to obtain as large a sample as possible. I was able to attain contact with organizations that represented each province as well as the two territories. In addition, the questionnaire in this study invited searching parents who were willing to be interviewed to contact me. Five such interviews were conducted. Greif and Hegar (1993) also did follow-up interviews from their 1991 survey sample. Thus, the methodology for this study, reflects a combination of the methodologies used in Greif and Hegar's 1991, and 1993 studies.

The first section of this study addresses the following research questions: What is the frequency of pre-custodial versus post-custodial abductions? Is one parent more likely to abduct a child than the other? Is there a specific time frame when abductions are more likely to occur? Are girls more likely to be abducted than boys? Are children of a certain age more likely to be abducted than others? Is there a higher proportion of abductions by parents born outside Canada, than by parents born in Canada? What is the

proportion of abducted children being taken out of the country? These questions are more easily addressed through surveys because data can be obtained from a larger sample. Thus, generalizability is increased. Accordingly, I constructed a survey which would address these questions and the data were collected to establish the profiles of abducting parents, and of children most likely to be abducted.

Data were gathered through a questionnaire mailed out to parents whose children had been abducted, referred to in the present study as '*searching parents*' (See Appendix A for survey questionnaire). Through this approach I was able to access information that, at the time of writing, has not been available in Canada. The benefits of survey research are widely acknowledged by researchers in the field of social science. For example, Fowler (1984) stated that "*the strength of survey methods that result in their wide use are the value of statistical sampling, consistent measurement, and the ability to obtain information not systematically available elsewhere or in the form needed for analyses*" (p.12).

i) Questionnaire Design

The present study was designed after an extensive review of the literature, and discussions with professionals who work in the field of parental abduction. The survey instrument is based on common themes found throughout a majority of the studies on parental abduction. Using these previous studies, and the knowledge of professionals involved in parental abduction enhances the validity of the research instrument because their experience and knowledge provides a foundation through which further research can be established. Furthermore, adopting common themes from other studies permitted me

to compare parental abduction in Canada with that of the United States. This is important because a majority of the literature on parental abduction in Canada uses data gathered from the United States. Comparing the data will establish whether or not the profiles of abducting parents and abducted children are different in Canada than in the United States.

The majority of variables included in this survey are pertinent to most cases of parental abduction. In an attempt to establish a profile of the abductor, the survey questionnaire included variables such as: gender, socio-economic characteristics like age, marital status, ethnic background, and psychological and sociological variables pertaining to the events surrounding the abduction. To establish a profile of abducted children, variables include gender, age, and where possible variables pertaining to mental, physical and sexual harm to the abducted child[ren].

Two separate questionnaires were designed, one for parents still searching for their missing children, and one for parents whose children were recovered. This was done in order to minimize the emotional effect for parents still searching for their missing children. The survey instrument for parents who had recovered their children was similar to the one for parents still searching. However it also included questions on the after-effects of parental abduction, specifically with respect to the emotional and physical consequences of the abduction for the children, and I expected that these questions would raise emotional issues for parents still searching for their children. In consensus with ethical principles, I felt the *“humanistic obligation to consider the research participants and minimize or make negligible the adverse effects upon them”* (Palys, 1994: p.38). To minimize these effects, a list of counsellors across Canada was also included.

Parents still searching for their children were mailed an eight page survey consisting of seventy-nine questions. Parents who had recovered their children were mailed a ten page survey, consisting of ninety-seven questions. A majority of the questions were similar, however, the survey for parents who had recovered their children also addressed the issue of reunification. Therefore, the study was able to capture data on both the experiences of parents still searching for their children, as well as parents who had recovered their children.

ii) Pre-test

To further enhance the validity of a study, a majority of researchers agree that pre-testing a data collection instrument is necessary. *“Formal pretesting, is an invaluable part of the questionnaire design process...Every questionnaire should be pretested”* (Fowler: 1984.p101). Further supporting this, Neuman (1997) states, *“a researcher pilot tests questions so that questions are at an appropriate level of difficulty”* (p.240). By using a pretest, the researcher is able to determine whether or not the questions and response categories are appropriate, and if the questions measure what they were intended to measure. For this reason, the survey questionnaire was pretested before being sent to searching parents.

Bruce Berg (1995) outlines two steps to the pretest. The first is to have the instrument examined by individuals familiar with the study's subject matter. The second step involves conducting several practice runs to assess the effectiveness of the instrument. Accordingly, the questionnaire in this study was evaluated by supervisors

from the missing children's organizations prior to their agreement to participate in the study.

Once the initial draft of the present survey instrument was complete, a pretest was conducted. The goal of the pretest was to measure the range of ideas or opinions pertaining to the questions being asked. Specifically, I was interested in whether the wording of the questions and response categories were appropriate, and whether the skip logic was intelligible. The pre-test also allowed me to approximate the amount of time it would take to answer the survey.

The pre-test sample utilized consisted of fifteen people, although not parents who had their children abducted. I attempted to make the pre-test sample as diverse as possible, by choosing respondents who were both male and female, and from a variety of educational and cultural backgrounds. Four of the fifteen were volunteers or employees of missing children organizations who were chosen for their knowledge of the material included in the survey. The pre-test selection sample was chosen in support of Fowler's argument that: *"A pretest sample should include the range of education and life situations that one would expect to find in the final sample"* (1984: p.104).

Following the pretest, I met with each of the members of the sub-sample to gain feedback about the survey. *"The value of a pretest can be enhanced by asking a set of questions specifically about the questionnaire itself, ie confusing, difficult to answer, etc"* (Fowler. 1984: p.104). Each of the respondent's comments were documented, and the questionnaire was modified to address a majority of the issues raised.

iii) Sample

The most reasonable option for learning more about abduction was to focus on parents who had gone through, or are going through this experience. However, the study design used limits the sample to parents who contacted a missing children's organization and who were willing to respond to the lengthy questionnaire. Although this threatens the generalizability to other searching parents, it reports the experiences of a broader group of parents than previous research has. In addition, it would have been extremely difficult to obtain a sample of parents who had abducted their children, or children who had been abducted. Researchers who have been able to interview recovered children note that most of their parents feel that interviewing the children would further induce emotional trauma (Abrahms, 1983; Greif and Hegar, 1991).

Finding and gaining access to parents who have had their children abducted by the other parent, and subsequently gathering a reasonable sample size, proved to be difficult. In an attempt to gain information on searching parents, I approached the RCMP Missing Children's Registry, as well as all of the missing children's organizations. Understandably, neither would provide names of searching parents. The only possible way to reach this sample was to use missing children's organizations as a liason.

To capture the complexity of parental abduction, I thought it best to include a variety of respondents. Thus, the criteria for this study consisted of the following: any parent who had contacted a missing children's organization because their child[ren] had been abducted by the other parent. This included, parents who have or had sole, primary, or joint custody, including those who were still married at the time of the abduction,

parents who are still searching, as well as parents who have recovered their children.

This criteria captures the experiences of a variety of individuals, thus, facilitating a better understanding of the problem.

To gather a substantial sample out of the total population of parents who had experienced the abduction of a child, I contacted every missing children's organization that handles cases of parental abduction in Canada. I learned that each organization in Canada has developed an area of expertise. The organizations that declined typically focused on other types of missing children cases, such as runaways, and stranger abductions.

There are two missing children organizations in Canada that handle most of the cases of parental abduction: Child Find does not participate in the recovery of missing children, however, their focus is on prevention and raising awareness. Two of Child Find's nine provincial chapters declined participation, without explanation. Two others chapters agreed to participate however, these chapters failed to respond to repeated attempts at contact by both telephone and written correspondence. The remaining provincial chapters agreed to participate, they are as follows: Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick and Labrador.

The Missing Children's Society of Canada is actively involved in the search for missing children. Missing Children's Society has two offices, one in Edmonton, and one in Oakville, both of which agreed to participate. Between the two organizations, I gained access to a national sample of searching parents. This enhances the generalizability of the

study in that between the two participating organizations, each province and the two territories were represented.

Depending on the number of open or closed cases on file, participating organizations were mailed from one to thirty packets containing a letter explaining the research, the questionnaire, a return envelope (stamped and addressed), and a list of contacts for the respondents to call if the questionnaire raised any emotional issues for them. This list of contacts was enclosed in order to minimize any emotional trauma that this survey could raise for searching parents. I wanted the respondents to know that I understood, and respected that I was asking them to share very personal and emotional experiences with me. Each organization then addressed and mailed the appropriate packages to the searching parents.

Originally I had requested that the surveys be sent to all parents who had contacted the missing children organizations, both open and closed cases. However, several of the 'gatekeepers' (contacts from organizations) from the organizations chose to first contact the parents and request their participation in this study prior to mailing the package. This approach may have interfered with the reliability and validity of the data. Although I was not in agreement with this approach, I had minimal input, as these 'gatekeepers' were my only access to the intended population.

It should be noted that this dual approach to gaining a sample presents two major shortcomings. Firstly, this method increases the likelihood of selection error, that is, a systematic bias in the manner in which respondents are selected for participation in the

survey. Incomplete or improper procedures for selecting participants leads to selection error, which may lead to a misrepresentation of the selected sample.

Secondly, the methods used to reach the sample were inconsistent, some parents received the survey without prior notice, while others were approached personally about participating. However, both groups were given the option not to fill out the survey, albeit at different stages of the process, this option minimizes the potential problems with selection bias. Searching parents who were not given prior notice about the survey still had the opportunity not to respond, in the same way that those who were contacted were also given the opportunity not to respond.

The range of experiences of respondents included in these sample criteria is a strength of this study. The two prior Canadian studies on parental abduction are limited because they focused on cases where a custodial order was in place at the time of the abduction, where the child was recovered and solely on Ontario cases. The criteria ignores the experiences of parents who were still married at the time of the abduction, or those who did not yet have a legal custody order in place. However, the strength of these previous studies should not be ignored. Both provide the foundation for further research in an area that to date, has been virtually ignored by Canadian researchers. Comparing similarities and differences between the findings of this study and those other studies therefore, will facilitate a deeper understanding of the prevalence and nature of parental abduction in Canada.

iv) Response Rate

In survey research, Fowler concluded that “*the difficulties of getting the response rate to a reasonable level will depend on the nature of the study, the nature of the sample, how motivated people are, and how easy the task is to perform*” (Fowler: 1984.p.54).

Parental abduction is a sensitive area to research; in consequence, a sample is difficult to access. Seventy-seven surveys were mailed to searching parents, five unopened surveys and sixteen completed surveys were returned. Thus, the response rate for this study was twenty-two percent. Mail surveys generally attain a lower response rate as they are very impersonal in nature. In support of this argument Palys (1992) notes that “*impersonal mail-out questionnaires more commonly result in response rates in the 10 to 40 percent range*” (p.163).

The response rate from this study is comparable to other studies on parental abduction which used a similar approach. For example, in their 1991 mail survey, Greif and Hegar had a response rate between fifteen percent (if respondents received only one survey) and twenty-seven percent (if respondents received two surveys). This is also comparable with that of Janvier et al. (1990) who reported a response rate of twenty three percent. Thus, despite the deviation in the way in which the sample was gathered, my response rate is consistent. However, a response rate of twenty two percent also offers hesitation about generalization and this similarity to the other studies may elicit some of the same criticisms argued against their data analysis.

Non-response rate pertains to the number of people who received the surveys that do not respond to them (Fowler. 1984: p.45). There are three possible reasons that

respondents selected in a sample do not actually provide data. Firstly, the survey did not reach the respondent. In the present study six percent of the surveys were returned unopened. One possible explanation is that many parents move after recovering their children, leaving no forwarding address. Secondly, the respondent may choose not to fill out the questionnaire. The third possible explanation for non-response is that the respondent may not be able to respond due to language barriers, or that reading and writing skills may be lower than required to fill out the questionnaire.

There are several ways to increase the response rate. In the present study the following steps were taken. A personalized cover letter was included in every survey. This letter explained the purpose of the study, requested the respondent's cooperation, guaranteed confidentiality, and included my name and a contact number. Two additional letters were also included: one from Sergeant John Oliver from the RCMP Missing Children's Registry, and another from my thesis supervisor (Professor Dennis Forcese). A list of contact numbers was also included if the respondents felt a need to discuss any emotional issues the questionnaire might invoke. The questionnaire was neat and professionally printed, and the questions easy to read. The back page of the questionnaire was left blank and the respondent was asked for additional information or comments. In addition, a postage paid return envelope was included. Finally, follow up reminders were sent to respondents.

In this fashion, I attempted to control for many factors that affect the response rate of a survey. A major hurdle experienced in the present survey was the Canadian postal strike. There was the hint of a potential mail strike for weeks prior to the actual strike.

This may have discouraged respondents from returning the completed surveys. The strike commenced two weeks after the surveys were sent out, and lasted almost three weeks. Following the strike, mail delivery was slow.

A subsequent problem arose after the mail strike ended. It was mid-December when the postal workers were legislated back to work, which in terms of mail volume, is the busiest holiday season of the year. I believe that both these factors contributed to a lower response rate than originally expected. Literature on survey research suggests that one way to increase response rate is to avoid survey research during holiday periods (Fowler, 1984; Neuman, 1997). During this period people are busy shopping and preparing for Christmas, while others spend Christmas away from home.

II) QUALITATIVE APPROACH

In order to gain a deeper understanding of how parental abduction affects families involved, four searching parents were interviewed. Here, a semi-structured interview format was used. This approach allowed me to ask specific questions as well as give participants the opportunity both to address the issues s/he thought were relevant and to proceed in a manner s/he felt was appropriate. Interviews lasted from 1.5 to 3 hours with the average duration of 2 hours. The interviews took place during the first two weeks of December, 1997.

The exploratory nature of this project makes the use of semi-structured interviews particularly appropriate. According to May (1993), qualitative methods are also likely to be appropriate when the goal of research is to investigate how participants interpret and understand events, experiences and beliefs. Qualitative methods are also appropriate

when little is known about a phenomenon. Very little is known about the phenomenon of parental abduction.

Quantitative methods of data collection allow for generalizations to be made about patterns of parental abduction. In contrast, qualitative methods allow researchers to capture a deeper, more personal understanding of how parental abduction affects the lives of those involved. In order to gain a realistic understanding of parental abduction, it is important to incorporate the experiences of those involved. From a sociological perspective, it is imperative to gain multiple interpretations of parental abduction. The voice of the searching parent dominates existing studies, in consequence, perceptions of the abductor are largely subjective.

Researchers reviewed in the previous chapter acknowledge the absence of research in the area of parental abduction and how it affects the families involved. For example, Forehand, and his colleagues (1989) note “*despite its prevalence and emotional pain involved, little is known about families that experience an abduction*” (p.72).

Regarding parental abduction in Canada, even fewer studies have been conducted on the impact parental abduction has on the family. Because it is such a complex issue, I believed it was important to be open and responsive to how the individuals involved interpreted their experiences, rather than to impose a pre-defined set of notions.

i) Sample

As outlined in the previous section, finding and gaining access to searching parents was both difficult and time consuming. In order to gain a sample of respondents for the second part of the study, I invited the searching parents who received the survey to contact me. At the time of writing, four searching parents agreed to be interviewed. Two

lived within the vicinity of Toronto, making face-to-face interviews a viable option. The third lived in British Columbia, but due to a limited amount of funding, a telephone interview was the only option for this respondent. Contact with the fourth respondent interviewed, was made through volunteering with the local chapter of Child Find. A fifth parent interview was scheduled, but at the designated time for the interview the respondent was not home, and did not resume any contact. Thus, out of all the participants who responded to the survey questionnaire, close to six percent were interviewed. Although this is a small number, the experiences that these interviews capture are an integral part of exploratory research.

ii) The Interview

For the face-to-face interviews, respondents chose times and locations that were appropriate for them. Permission was granted from all of the respondents to tape record the interviews. Confidentiality was assured, and respondents were invited to terminate the interview at any point. Respondents were asked some basic questions about their own background. These questions were asked so that a participant profile could be developed, and the sampling process could be accounted for.

The interview itself was divided into four parts (see appendix C for interview schedule). In the first part of the interview I asked the respondents to describe their relationship with the abductor prior to its dissolution. This included how they met, their subsequent courtship and where applicable, their marriage. These questions were asked in order to gain a deeper understanding of the background of both the searching parent, and the abductor, as well as their family relationship prior to the abduction. Another purpose was to gain insight into whether or not there was a history of domestic violence.

In the second section, the respondents were asked details surrounding the abduction itself. The purpose of these questions was to gain a deeper understanding of the initial impact of parental abduction. Next the respondents were asked details about the search for their abducted child[ren]. In three of the four interviews only one child was abducted, in the fourth case two children were abducted. I was interested in the process the respondents went through, and in one case, is still going through, to recover their abducted children. I was also interested to know how the abduction has affected, or continues to affect, the lives of the family members left behind. Finally, the questions in the last section pertained to the three cases where the children were recovered. The purpose of these questions was to gain a better understanding of reunification issues after a child has been recovered, as well as the overall impact of the abduction on the family.

iii) Participant Profile

Three of the four respondents were female. Two of the females and the male respondent were between thirty-two and thirty-five at the time of the abduction. The other female was in her early twenties. One of the respondents was born in England, one in Yugoslavia, one in East Africa, and the other in Canada. All of the respondents were working professionals and three of the four had a university degree. Their incomes ranged from less than \$15,000 to between \$51,000 to \$60,000.

Advantages/Disadvantages

As well as the unlimited amount of information obtained through face-to-face interviews, researchers also have the advantage of observing the participant's surroundings. In the present study, three out of the four interviews took place in the respondent's homes. Furthermore, given that the interviews were conducted in person, in

this way I was also able to observe nonverbal communication, such as facial expressions and body language. These behaviours can provide information as to how the respondent feels about what is being discussed.

The biggest disadvantage to interviews are their cost and time required. Additionally, if the interviewer chooses to record the interview, additional time and costs are required to transcribe the tapes. Interview bias is also greater in face-to-face interviews, such that the appearance, tone of voice, question wording etc. which may affect the subject's response. (Neuman. 1997: p253).

Using a combined quantitative and qualitative methodological approach of survey questionnaires and interviews facilitates a deeper understanding of parental abduction. The survey questionnaire allowed me to address some of my research questions. There were two major strengths to the interviews. First, subjects were able to provide additional details to the information provided in the surveys. Second, the subjects could elaborate, and provide knowledge about parental abduction that may not otherwise have been available. The interviews also provided a voice for the searching parents to share their personal experiences, and perceptions of parental abduction. Findings from the survey, and analysis from the individuals interviewed are presented in chapter four and five.

Chapter Four: SURVEY ANALYSIS

This chapter analyzes in detail the responses to the survey questionnaire completed for this study. The first section presents findings on the respondents (the searching parents), the abductors, and abducted children. In addition, findings about the circumstances surrounding the abduction, as well as the after-effects of abduction for recovered children are presented. The second section presents a discussion on international abduction. These discussions focus on the differences between international and domestic abduction. Specific attention is given to the Hague Convention, and the complexity of recovering children taken out of the country

It is difficult to capture the emotional impact that parental abduction brings forth to those involved. In some cases, the parents were still married to, or involved with, the abductor immediately prior to the abduction. In such cases, the searching parent may have been under the impression that there was nothing wrong with his/her family life. However, for the majority of cases in this study, the relationship between the searching parent and the abductor had dissolved prior to the abduction. Yet, regardless of the circumstances prior to the abduction, the parent has been forced to deal with a devastating and complicated problem.

In cases of parental abduction, searching parents deal with two significant losses. The first being the failure of a marriage (relationship), the second is the loss of their child[ren]. The dissolution of a marriage itself is a stressful event for the individuals involved. Psychologists have concluded that such a breakup leaves individuals feeling a mixture of emotions ranging from failure, and loss, to anger and depression (Greif and

Hegar. 1993: p. 23). When children are involved, the dissolution of the relationship becomes even more convoluted. Children create a bond between individuals that cannot be broken simply because the relationship has ended. As such, issues of child custody and access tend to further complicate an already delicate situation. When individuals are unable to resolve custody and access issues parental abduction may be seen as a possible solution.

i) The Searching Parent

In a majority of the studies examined, little reference is given to the socio-demographic characteristics of the searching parent. However, there are several studies that provide some background information about the searching parent (Greif and Hegar, 1991; Janvier and McCormick, 1990; Sherman and Staff, 1993).

In the present study, mothers whose children were abducted comprised 69% of the sample, and fathers the remaining 31%. This sample is similar to the sample of two other Canadian studies of parental abduction. Both Sherman and Staff (1993) and Swarren and Dalley (1993) reported a higher proportion of female respondents. In contrast, some other studies examined report a more equal proportion of searching parents. For example, both Greif and Hegar (1991) and Janvier and McCormick (1990) reported that 55% of searching parents were female, while 45% were male.

Most of the respondents in the current study were between the ages of 32 and 41 years old (69%). Half (50%) were between the ages of 32 and 36 years of age. A moderate proportion (25%) were between the ages of 42 and 50 years old. The age of the respondents in this sample is similar to other studies. For example, all of the respondents in Sherman and Staff's study (1993) were between the ages of 32 and 36 years old with a

median age of 33.6 years. The median age of the sample in Greif and Hegar's study (1991) was 36 years old.

Thirty one percent of the respondents were born in Canada (31%), the remaining sixty nine percent were born outside of Canada. This finding is inconsistent with the findings from other studies. For example, Greif and Hegar (1991) reported that 92% of their sample were born in the United States. The respondent's religious affiliation in the present study also differs slightly from the Greif and Hegar study. In both studies, 25% of the respondents were Roman Catholic. However, in the Greif and Hegar study, a majority of the respondents (50%) were Protestant, as compared to 19% in the present study. Furthermore, one quarter of the respondents in this study were Muslim. Greif and Hegar did not include Muslim as a religious category in their study.

The educational attainment of the respondents in this study was higher than most other studies. A majority of the respondents reported that they had completed college or university at the time of the abduction (56%). Only a minority of the respondents in Sherman and Staff's study (1993) had completed college (20%), the majority reported having completed grade twelve (60%). Greif and Hegar (1991) reported that 60% of their sample had completed at least one year of education past high-school.

At the time of the abduction, a majority of the searching parents were working (81%). Reported incomes ranged from less than \$15,000 (12.5%) to more than \$60,000 (6.3%). More than half of the respondents (31%) reported an income level between \$25,000 and \$30,999. In contrast, the majority of respondents in Greif and Hegar's study (1991) reported an income of less than \$27,000 (60%). These findings support the conclusions of Kiedrowski and his colleagues (1994) who reported that the income of

abductors in Canada differed substantially from the incomes reported in the U.S. studies. (p.14).

The differences between the present study and that of Greif and Hegar are important as they may highlight the differences between cases of parental abduction in Canada and the United States. For example, in Canada a majority of respondents were born elsewhere, contrasting with Greif and Hegar's U.S. study. Also noted, the respondents' religious affiliation differ, which may indicate different ethnic backgrounds of the respondents.

Such comparisons indicate that the relationship between parental abduction and culture in Canada may be more stronger than in the United States. This is not surprising considering the multicultural philosophy currently existing in Canada. Furthermore, differences between this Canadian study, and Greif and Hegar's U.S. study indicate that we should not make generalizations about parental abduction in Canada, based on data gathered in the United States. Rather, further research is needed to reflect the issues surrounding parental abduction in Canada.

ii) The Abductor

Research based on the abducting parent's perspective is scant. As noted in chapter two, when making conclusions about abducting parents, the source from which the information was provided must be acknowledged. Accordingly, Greif and Hegar (1994) concluded that:

"The literature provides a portrait of abductors that is varied and complex. Searching parents frequently describe abductors as revengeful and angry, while the few abductors interviewed expressed concern for their children, and find the courts are unresponsive to their concerns" (p.284).

Similar to most of the other studies examined, the information about the abductor has been provided by the searching parent. The questions in the survey instrument were designed with this in mind. Respondents were asked to provide socio-demographic information on the other parent. Only a few subjective questions were asked. Table five presents a summary profile of the abductor based on the survey analysis.

Table Five: Profile of Abducting Parent

GENDER:	Male (63%)
AGE:	37-41 yrs (38%), 42-50 (31%)
BORN:	Outside of Canada (75%)
DOMESTIC/INT'L CASE:	International abduction (63%)
EDUCATION:	Some college or university (38%)
EMPLOYMENT:	Not employed at time of abduction (56%)
INCOME:	\$25,000-\$30,999 (25%) < \$15,000 (25%)
MARITAL STATUS:	Legally separated (44%), divorced (31%)
LEGAL CUSTODY ORDER MADE:	Yes (54%), No (46%)
TYPE OF CUSTODY:	Interim/Primary custody: mother (75%)

In this study there was a higher proportion of male (63%) than female abductors (37%). These findings are consistent with the two previous studies done in Canada. Swaren and Dalley (1994) reported a majority of male abductors (81%); while Sherman and Staff (1993) reported 60% of the abductors were male. The difference in the proportions between these studies may be contributed to the small sample size. For example, Sherman and Staff (1993) had a sample of 5 cases, while both the present study, and that of Swaren and Dalley (1993) had sixteen cases.

Other studies examined reported similar findings. For example, Agopian (1980,1981) found that in seventy-one percent of the cases he studied, the abductor was male. Accordingly, Finkelhor et. al. (1991) concluded that in seventy-five percent of the cases studied, the abductor was male. While it appears that males are more likely to

abduct their children, the relationship between the gender of the abductor and custodial patterns must also be considered. For example, Kiedrowski and his colleagues (1994) reported that the proportion of female abductors increases when custodial arrangements are taken into consideration (p.9). This issue is further explored in the section on custody arrangements and parental abduction.

Several parental abduction studies reveal males as the principal abductor. In an overview of parental abduction, Kiedrowski et al. (1994) report “*there have been many empirical studies that have supported the popular belief of a male preponderance*” (p.9). The gender of the abducting parent is paramount in establishing a profile of the abductor. however, as discussed in chapter one, the gender of the abductor is also influenced by custodial trends.

In contrast to the findings from this study and the previous Canadian studies, other studies report a higher or equal proportion of female abductors. Both Sagatun and Barrett (1990) and Greif and Hegar (1991) reported slightly higher proportions of female abductors, than males. Furthermore, Janvier et al.(1990) examined the relationship between gender and the child being taken out of the country. These researchers reported that there was a higher proportion of female abductors in domestic cases (61%). These findings have been supported by Kiedrowski et al. (1994) who reported that a higher proportion of international abduction cases (81%) involved male abductors. Similar patterns were found in this study where the majority of cases were international abductions (63%), and the majority of abductors were male (63%).

The gender of the abductor is largely influenced by circumstances surrounding the family dissolution and patterns of custody. Currently, popular opinion appears to be that

a majority of abductors are male. This premise is based on present custodial trends in which mothers are more likely to be awarded custody. While more fathers are applying for sole or joint custody, the trend still holds that more mothers have legal custody of their children than do fathers. However, the recent pattern of the increase in joint custody and father only custody awards may be influencing a larger number of mothers to use abduction as an alternative.

The relationship between gender of the abductor and custodial arrangements exemplifies how the issue of parental abduction is more than a private matter, there is also larger societal and legal issues involved. Many researchers support this view. Kiedrowski et al. (1994) concluded that “*custody arrangements ensure that the pool of prospective abducting fathers is greater than that for mothers...If patterns of custody were to change and more fathers were to be given custody, abductors would then be largely female*” (p.10). Similar conclusions were made by other researchers (Abrahms, 1983; Agopian, 1980).

iii) Socio-Demographic Characteristics

This section focuses on characteristics of abducting parents. Other studies reviewed report certain characteristics that remain relatively consistent in a majority of studies. Characteristics include: age, employment status, and income of the abductor. (Agopian, 1981; Finkelhor et al. 1991; Greif and Hegar, 1993; Sagatun and Barrett, 1990). Each one of these variables will be examined in detail.

Age

A majority of the abductors (38%) in this study were between 37 and 41 years old. A further 31% fell between the ages of 42 and 50 years old. Less than ten percent of the

abductors were under the age of 30 (6%). The age range for the abductors in this study is slightly higher than that of other studies examined. For example, Swaren and Dalley (1993) reported that the majority of abductors (25%) were between the ages of 24 and 30 years old. The mean age in their study was 31 years old (19%). Their findings are somewhat more consistent with other studies, where the average age of the abductors ranged from late twenties to late thirties. Agopian (1980, 1981) reported that the mean age of abductors in his sample was thirty-three and Greif and Hegar (1991) reported a median age of abductors in their sample was thirty-six years old.

Interestingly, Greif and Hegar also reported that the age of abductors in international cases was higher. This may be a possible explanation for the higher age range of abductors in this study. Similar to the searching parents in this sample, the majority of abductors were born outside of Canada (75%). This proportion is high compared to the studies reviewed, and worthy of attention. Once again, these findings highlight the relationship between parental abduction and culture. Motivational factors precipitating the abduction may be linked to cultural beliefs or traditions regarding parental and gender roles.

The majority of cases examined in this study were international abductions (63%). Likewise, the proportion of international abduction cases may be higher, as close to one third of the respondents (31%) do not know where their children are. Results from a cross-tabular analysis indicate that 83% of the abductors between the ages of thirty-seven and forty-one, also took their children out of the country.

This age profile reflects a period when the parents are most likely to be involved in raising younger children. Researchers claim that bringing children into a relationship

creates additional stress for the individuals involved (Greif and Hegar, 1992). Thus, couples may be more likely to terminate the relationship, at this point increasing their likelihood to be involved in custody disputes.

Education

A majority of the abductors in this sample had at least some college or university (38%), and a moderate proportion had completed either college or university (19%). These findings are somewhat inconsistent with those of Greif and Hegar (1991) in which only 39 % of their sample had completed high school. It would appear that the education level of abducting parents in Canada is higher than that of the United States. These findings would support Greif and Hegar's conclusions that in cases of international abduction, the education level of the abductors was higher than in domestic abduction cases. Considering that a majority of the abductors in this study were born abroad, and that the abductors in this study also had high levels of education, support is increased for the premise that a relationship exists between ethnicity, education levels, and abduction.

Employment and Income

A majority of the abductors in this sample (56%) were not employed at the time of abduction, while 44% were employed. The proportion of abductors employed is moderately higher than that of other studies reviewed. For example, Agopian (1980,1981) reported that 21% of the abducting parents in their sample were unemployed. In addition, researchers have concluded that in domestic cases, abductors have lower levels of education, and are less likely to be working compared to the searching parent (Greif and Hegar, 1993; Sagatun and Barrett, 1990).

Income patterns of the abductor in the present study are also inconsistent with that of other studies. Respondents indicated that one quarter of the abducting parents had an income of less than \$15,000, while one quarter had an income between \$25,000 and \$30,999. In thirteen percent of the cases, the abductor had no income, while in 19% of the cases, the respondent did not know the level of income of the abductor. Swaren and Dalley (1993) reported that 50% of the abducting parents in their sample had an income of less than \$24,999.

Kiedrowski et al. (1994) suggested that the income level of abductors in Canada differs from that of abductors in the United States, stating that, "*The income of Canadian abductors is much higher than that of abductors in the United States*" (p.14). One possible reason for the difference in income could be related to the value of the American dollar as opposed to that of the Canadian dollar. For example, at the time of writing, one U.S. dollar is worth \$1.39 Canadian. However, caution must be exercised when making comparisons between studies, as there is very little Canadian data to make comparisons with.

Criminal Record

Respondents in this study reported that the majority of the abductors (63%) did not have a criminal record prior to the abduction, 25% did have a previous criminal conviction, and a small proportion (13%) of the searching parents reported not knowing about the abductor's prior criminal history. There is a slight difference between these findings and that of Swaren and Dalley (1993). These researchers concluded that half of the abductors in their sample did not have a prior criminal record. There was a slightly lower proportion of abductors with a criminal record (18%).

iv) Family Relationship Prior To Abduction: Marital Status

In the majority of cases examined, the relationship between the searching parent and the abductor had already been severed prior to the abduction. Only a small proportion of cases showed the relationship between the abductor and the searching parent still intact. At the time of the abduction, almost half of the respondents were legally separated (44%), while almost one third were divorced (31%). The remaining respondents were either still married (6%), or living common-law (13%). A very small proportion (6%) had never been married to, or ever lived with, the abductor.

These findings are comparable to those of Finkelhor and his colleagues (1993). These researchers reported that 54% of the respondents in their sample were separated, 37% were divorced, and 9% were still involved in the relationship. The most apparent difference between these two studies is that Finkelhor and his colleagues reported a higher proportion of respondents that were separated at the time of the abduction, and a lower proportion were still together.

The marital status of the respondents in Greif and Hegar's sample (1991) are slightly different. They reported that 43% of the respondents in their sample were divorced, 27% were separated, and 17% were still involved in the marriage or common-law relationship. The major difference between these studies is that both the present study, and Finkelhor et al. found that the majority of the respondents had not obtained a legal divorce, while the majority of separated parents in Greif and Hegar's study had.

These differences highlight two important issues. Notably, if the searching parents were separated from the abductors, it is likely that legal custody may not yet have been determined. There may have been an 'interim' custody order, which is a temporary

order determined by the courts, but there may not have been any custodial order in place. This issue leads to the second issue. Police are less likely to treat a case as 'parental abduction' if there is no custody order in place. In one of the interviews conducted, the police refused to investigate the case because the mother abducted the child the day before the custody hearing. These issues are extremely important to this study, and are further discussed in the next section.

Custody and Access

The decision to end a marriage is a private matter. However, if the marriage was a legalized union, the couple must proceed through the court system to terminate the relationship. At this stage, the private matter shifts into the public domain, as the couple must proceed through a predetermined legal process. Other institutions then become involved in the process of obtaining a divorce, and deciding on custodial issues.

In the context of family break-up, parental abduction becomes an option for parents dissatisfied with court decisions concerning custody or access. This provides support to show that there is a relationship between parental abduction and custodial decisions. It is imperative to examine this relationship in the investigation of parental abduction.

At the time of the abduction, 44% of the respondents had a legal custody order in place, while 31% had an interim or pending custody order. Even though the relationship had been severed, 13% of the respondents reported that there was no custody order in place. The remaining 12% refers to the respondents that were still married at the time of the abduction.

Making comparisons in this area is difficult because a number of studies excluded respondents who did not have a custodial order in place at the time of the abduction. This is a common and recurring problem in the investigation of parental abduction. Janvier and her colleagues (1990), reported that legal custody had not yet been determined in one quarter of the cases in their sample. They concluded that lack of having a legal custody order presents difficulties for initiating a search for abducted children, and for searching parents to regain custody after children are located (p.7).

Since one quarter of Janvier et. al.'s sample did not have a legal custody order prior to the abduction, their experiences are not statistically accounted for. This provides support for the premise, as discussed in chapter four, that the actual prevalence of parental abduction is higher than statistically indicated. Lack of police response or statistical reporting reflects a lack of awareness regarding the process that searching parents experience when their child is taken from them. The lack of police response, and implications thereof, are discussed in chapter five.

Type of Custody

This discussion focuses on the type of custody order that was in place at the time of the abduction, and also examines the relationship between the gender of the abductor and when the abduction occurred. The timing of the abduction provides significant and distinguishing factors in the development of the profile of the abductor. Agopian (1980) supports the premise that there is a relationship between custodial trends, and parental abduction. *"The dynamics that make for a parent abducting a child are often complex, and rooted in the battle for custody and the process of awarding custody to a particular parent"* (p.59). In several of the studies reviewed, the point at which the abduction

occurred, relative to having a custody order established, also differed between gender. (Agopian, 1980; Finkelhor et al., 1991; Greif and Hegar, 1991). This investigation facilitates the establishment of the profile, and the development of mediation and prevention measures.

In this study, a majority of the abductions occurred after a custodial order was in place (54%). However, a large number of cases occurred when custody was pending a legal order (39%). The remaining 7% had no legal custody order in place because they were still living together at the time of the abduction. Further examination found that more fathers abducted after a legal custody order was established (71%), while more mothers abducted prior to the custody decision (50%).

Of the cases in which a legal custody order was established, seventy-five percent of the mothers had custody of the children. At the time of the abduction the majority of mothers had interim custody of their children (37.5%). A further twenty five percent had sole custody, while almost thirteen percent had primary custody (12.5%). In a small number of cases (6%), the father had sole custody, and 6% had joint custody.

These proportions indicate that where a legal custody order existed, mothers were more likely to have custody (75%). Furthermore, when there was a legal custody order in place, fathers were more likely to be the abductors (71%). Thus, it appears that fathers are more likely to abduct their children when the mother has primary custody of their child[ren]. Females were most likely to abduct when there was a pending custody hearing (50%). Thus, their motives may stem from fear of losing custody of their child[ren]. The motive of abduction is further discussed in the next chapter.

Comparisons between the present study, and some of the other studies examined are difficult because of the differences in the way data was coded, and/or explained. For example, Greif and Hegar (1991) reported that 50% of their respondents had sole custody, 29% had joint custody, and 14% had visitation. They do not provide a breakdown based on gender, and their sample of respondents were almost equally male (45%), and female (55%).

Sagatun and Barrett (1990) reported that the proportion of pre and post custody abductions were almost equal. A higher proportion occurred prior to a custodial order (49%). However, an almost equal amount occurred (47%) after a custodial order was in place. In a small proportion of cases (5%), the respondents were unclear as to whether there was an existing custodial order at the time of the abduction. These researchers concluded that a higher proportion of fathers abduct prior to a court order, and a higher proportion of mothers took their children after a court order. Finkelhor and his colleagues (1991) reached the same conclusions. The majority of the abductions in their study (60%) were in violation of a custody order. Of this sub-sample, 80% were female, and 20% were male.

The findings of this study are somewhat inconsistent with other studies examined, where mothers were more likely to abduct prior to a custodial decision being made, and fathers after. This may be due to cultural influences in which fathers are most likely to be abductors. A more in-depth discussion on cultural influences is presented in the following section on international abduction.

A majority of researchers would support the view that the primary motivation for fathers to abduct, is fear of a custody outcome, whereas for mothers, it is dissatisfaction with the custody outcome. For example, Kiedrowski and his colleagues stated:

“Fathers fearing that the court order would favour the mother, abducted the child before the court order was made. Mothers, expecting a favourable custody order, were disappointed when the father was granted custody and abducted the child after the custody order was made” (1994: p.11).

These findings would not explain the findings from this study in which mothers were more likely to abduct prior to a custodial decision. The relationship between timing, custodial decisions, and gender, highlight the need to further consider the external issues surrounding custody. It also highlights the need for a greater emphasis on mediation and attempts to resolve issues before legal action is taken. In an attempt to minimize the effects of parental abduction, researchers argue that when a family unit dissolves, expediency through the court system is necessary (Greif and Hegar, 1993, 1994). This may facilitate a decrease in the number of abductions where the primary motive of the abductor was frustration with the court process. In addition, this would also speed up the custody decision making process. As such, this would speed up the search process for parents who report the abduction to the police.

Violence

Preliminary discussions with contacts working for Child Find, and findings from several research studies (Greif and Hegar, 1991, 1994; Long et. al., 1991) indicate the need to address the issue of family violence in the investigation of parental abduction. Family researchers have concluded that the home is the primary place in which violence occurs (Gelles, 1972; Straus and Steinmetz, 1975). The following discussion cannot

claim a direct relationship between various types of violence and parental abduction. It can however, provide the foundation to increase awareness about the commonality of family violence, and the possibility of abduction if such cases end in divorce. It also provides support to show that in many cases, the family unit is not always conducive to a warm and loving environment.

Greif and Hegar (1994) found that one quarter of the abductors in their sample had abused drugs and alcohol, and that domestic violence was evident in sixty percent of the abductions (p.284). Long et al. (1991) noted that domestic violence was present in approximately fifty percent of their sample. A further twenty-six percent of the abductors abused drugs, twenty-one percent abused alcohol, and eleven percent were sexually abusive.

Of the respondents in this sample who were separated or divorced at the time of abduction, eighty-one percent reported abusive behaviour as a primary reason for the breakdown of the family relationship. Most of these respondents (32%) also reported the abducting parent as mentally abusive during their relationship. A large proportion (19%) reported both physical and mental abuse. Six percent reported that their former partner had been controlling.

Thirty seven percent of the sample reported a combination of abusive behaviours. Six percent reported that the abductor was mentally abusive, but also had problems with drug and alcohol abuse. An additional six percent reported the abductor as both mentally and sexually abusive. Only nineteen percent of the respondents reported that no abusive behaviours existed in their relationship with the abductor.

The survey questionnaire also asked the respondents if they had any type of problems with abuse. The majority, eighty-eight percent, reported having no problems. Six percent reported having problems with drug abuse, and six percent reported being mentally abusive toward the abducting parent.

The questionnaire also asked if the abductor was ever abusive towards the children during the relationship. Sixty-two percent of the respondents reported some type of abuse and (38%) reported that the abductor was often emotionally abusive towards the children. A small proportion (6%) reported that the abducting parent was physically abusive toward the child and 6% reported that the abductor was neglectful to the children (6%). Twelve percent reported a combination of abuse. Six percent reported the abducting parent as emotionally and physically abusive toward the children, and six percent reported the abducting parent as both neglectful, and emotionally abusive toward the children. The remaining thirty-eight percent reported that the abductor was never abusive toward their children.

Respondents who indicated abuse in their relationship with the abductor were asked to explain how it affected their relationship. A variety of responses were provided. One respondent stated that “*..he was very manipulative, and impossible to communicate with...the more I wanted to keep the family together, the more he was abusive verbally, emotionally and mentally*”. Another stated that “*..this took my self-esteem away. I depended on him too much. The way he wanted me to. I gave him all my love and material things to keep our family happy. Whatever I would do, he was never happy. He is a very sad person.*” One of the subjects described the following incident which occurred while they were out of the country:

"We gave Evan (not his real name) a bath together, then I went to put his clothes on, and the child started crying. My husband started hitting me, kicking me, kicking me in the groin, and hitting me really hard. He was not scared, he would have killed me, because there was no one there to protect me. He said to me 'you can't pick up the phone and call 911'" (Interview. Dec. 4/97).

The relationship between family violence or abusive behaviours and parental abduction is complex, and difficult to prove. However, it is possible that individuals who have resorted to, or experienced violence in the past, may be more likely to consider abduction. If the abductor was violent in the past, s/he may abduct the children as a way of lashing out; whereas if the recipient of the abusive behaviour may abduct as a way of protecting the children.

v) Abducted Children

"The true victim of kidnapping is the child himself, who suffers from the sudden upsetting of his stability, and the traumatic loss of contact with the parent who is left behind" (Dyer, 1980: 21).

Children are the truly defenseless victims of this crime. This section provides details on the children who were abducted in this study. Table six provides a profile of abducted children based on data from the surveys.

Table Six: PROFILE OF ABDUCTED CHILDREN

Single/Multiple Abduction:	1 child (50%), 2 children (37%)
Gender:	Male (62%)
Gender as Abductor:	Same (58%)
Age:	3-6 yrs (50%), 7-9 (34%)
Site of Abduction:	Abductor's home (63%)
Day of Week:	Saturday (44%)
Month of Year:	July/August (51%)

There were a total of twenty-six children abducted in this study. Half of the cases in this sample pertained to the abduction of only one child. The remaining fifty percent

involved more than one child. In a large proportion of the cases (37%), there were two children abducted, and in 13% the abduction involved three children. These findings are somewhat inconsistent with some of the other studies in which a majority of the abductions involved only one child.

Agopian (1980) concluded that children are more likely to be 'seized singly'. In his study, one child was abducted in 64% of the cases, 30% of the cases involved two children, and a small proportion (6%), involved three children. Greif and Hegar (1991) reported that two thirds of the abductions in their sample involved one child. In further support of this conclusion, Sagatun and Barrett (1990) reported that the majority of the abductions in their sample involved only one child. Sherman and Staff (1993) reported that in a majority of cases, only one child was abducted (80%), while in one fifth of their sample, two children were abducted.

One plausible explanation for this is that in the majority of cases in this study, the children were taken abroad. Researchers have concluded that international abductions are more likely to involve more than one child (Greif and Hegar, 1991; Sagatun and Barrett, 1990). A further investigation of this hypothesis is presented in the section on international abduction.

The majority of children abducted in this study were male (62%). Thirty-eight percent of the cases involved the abduction of females. Researchers report inconsistent findings in this area. For example, similar to the present study, Greif and Hegar (1991) concluded that three quarters of the abducted children in their study were male. Presenting an opposing view, Sagatun and Barret (1990) reported that there was a higher proportion of females being abducted. Furthermore, other researchers claim that males

and females are equally likely to be abducted. In Agopian's study (1980), the proportion of males being abducted was only slightly higher (3%). In further support of this, Finkelhor and his colleagues (1991) reported that in their study, males and females were abducted in equal proportions.

The different conclusions reported in various studies examined provide support to my previous assertion that while there are similarities between cases of parental abduction, there are also differences that emphasize the unique aspects of parental abduction. There are possible explanations for the differences reported in the various studies examined. For example, one plausible reason for the high proportion of male children being abducted could be that the gender of the abducting parent was also male.

In the present study, the gender of the abductor was the same as the abducted child in more than half of the cases (58%). These findings are similar to those of Greif and Hegar (1991) who reported that the fifty-two percent of their abductions were by the same sex parent.

The youngest child abducted in this study was two years old, and the oldest was fourteen. The mean age was 6.77. The majority of children abducted in this study were either four, six, or seven years old (15% each). Twelve percent were nine years old, eight percent were three years old, and a further eight percent were five years old. Fifty percent of this sample was six years old or younger, while thirty four percent fell between the ages of seven and nine. The remaining sixteen percent were above the age of nine.

The range in ages of children in this study is somewhat different than that of other researchers, where a lower mean age of children is reported. For example, Greif and Hegar (1991) reported that seventy five percent of the abducted children in their sample

were six years old or younger. The mean age reported was two years old. Both Agopian (1980) and Forehand et. al. (1989) concluded that the majority of children in their samples were between three and five years old. Finkelhor and his colleagues (1991) reported a range between two and thirteen years, but the majority of children in their sample were two to three years old. These researchers concluded that children less than two are less likely to be 'snatched' because of the constant care infants require. Swaren and Dalley (1993) reported a mean age of four years old for the children in their sample.

Again, one of the possible explanations for the higher age range of abducted children in this study may be linked to the high number of international abductions. Greif and Hegar (1991) reported that the age of children is likely to be higher in cases of international abductions.

vi) The Abduction

The purpose of this section is to establish whether or not there are temporal variations, or patterns in the abduction of children. This examination will further facilitate the formulation of the profile of the abducting parent, and children most likely to be abducted. Is there a pattern according to the month of the year, day of the week, or time of the day that abductions are more likely to occur?

Site and Time of Abduction

The majority of cases in this study originated in Ontario (63%). There are two possible reasons for this. The most likely possibility is that the surveys were sent to a higher proportion of searching parents in Ontario than in any other province. Second, Ontario has the highest caseload of parental abductions. It is most likely that the combination of the aforementioned explicates the high proportion of cases originating in

Ontario. British Columbia had the second highest proportion (13%), while 6% of the cases originated in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Newfoundland. In both of the previous studies conducted in Canada, the sample was based on cases in Ontario. This study, therefore, provides more of a national representation of parental abduction in Canada.

In a majority of the cases examined for this study, the children were in the care of the abductor at the time of the abduction (63%). Thirteen percent were at the searching parent's home, and the same proportion were either at school or day-care. The remaining twelve percent were at the home of a friend or family member of the abductor. The large proportion of children in the abductor's care prior to the abduction, may be because the abducting parent was the custodial parent. Another possible explanation is that the child may have been visiting with the abductor. Contrary to the popular myth, a majority of these children are not abducted from a play ground, or other outside area.

In his study, Agopian (1980) noted that half of the abductions took place under the guise of a visitation between the non-custodial parent and the child[ren]. Sixty-seven percent of the abductions took place at the child's home, fourteen percent outdoors, or in a playground, twelve percent on school property, and six percent at the home of the abductor, or the home of the abductor's relative. He explains these findings in the following manner,

"in assessing the scene of parental child-snatchings, it becomes clear that offenders are seeking the most expeditious arena to take possession of the child. The location of child-thefts depicts those area where a child's activities occur – home, school, and streets or playgrounds" (p.79).

The common abduction site indicate an individual's desire for a site that is

predictable and affords ease of 'escape'. The child's home, school, or playground provide such opportunities (Agopian, 1980).

Most of the abductions in this study occurred during the summer months (51%). Twenty five percent occurred during July, thirteen percent in both June and August. Thirteen percent of the abductions also occurred during December. These findings are consistent with other studies, in which researchers claim that abductions occur during school holidays, both summer and Christmas (Finkelhor et al., 1991; Greif and Hegar, 1991, 1993). During these periods, the children are likely to be visiting the non-custodial parent. A small proportion of cases (6%), occurred in each of the following months: February, March, April, May, September, and November.

Although these findings are consistent with other studies (Finkelhor et.al., 1991; Greif and Hegar, 1993), other researchers claim, in contrast, that there are no distinct seasonal patterns to parental abduction. Agopian (1980) concluded that there was no distinct pattern with respect to the month of the year in which the abductions occurred. *"The distribution of parental child-thefts by season of the year fails to indicate any consistent pattern"* (p.69). However, he did conclude that fifty-five percent of the abductions in his sample occurred during day, weekend, or holiday visits (p.70).

The choice to abduct the children during a visitation period is advantageous for the abducting parent. If the visitation period is over the summer or Christmas holidays, the extended period of time allows the abductor to move away without raising any suspicion by the other parent.

A majority of the abductions in this study occurred on a Saturday (44%). The second day of the week in which they occurred was Tuesday (19%). The remaining abductions occurred on Monday (12.3%), Thursday (12.3%) and Friday (12.3%). Conversely, Agopian (1980) concluded that: "*Fridays were found to be the most perilous day of the week*" (p.70). Twenty-one percent of the children abducted in his sample, were taken on a Friday. This would provide support for his theory that abductions are more likely to occur during visitation periods. In cases where the abductor did not have primary custody, it is likely that they would have visitation with their children on a weekend, which is similar to the findings of this study.

A majority of the respondents in this sample did not know the time of day at which the abduction had occurred (31%). The most reasonable explanation for this was that a majority of the children were at the abductor's home prior to the abduction. Twenty five percent of the sample reported that the child was taken in the morning, a further eighteen percent in the afternoon, thirteen percent during the evening, and the remaining thirteen percent during the night.

Other researchers reported that the late afternoon and early evening were more conducive to parental abduction. (Agopian, 1980). Agopian noted that the second most common period of 'thefts' occurred between 8:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. Possible explanations for this pattern may be that visitation periods are likely to commence during the morning hours.

These time patterns for the occurrence of abduction supports the assumption that where the family unit has dissolved, abduction is more likely to occur during visitation

periods. The timeframe for the abductions in the present study parallels periods where the children were on school vacations, and possibly visiting the other parent.

vii) The Search

In establishing prevention and mediation measures to deal with parental abduction, it is important to understand how family members left behind deal with the impact of abduction. In some cases, there are siblings left behind by the abductor. One of the subjects interviewed for this study acknowledged that the child left behind becomes almost invisible. *"I know I neglect him. I work three jobs to pay for lawyers, I don't have time to spend with him...but he understands"* (Interview: Dec.4/97). However, the same respondent stated that this same child has become involved in delinquent behaviour. Greif and Hegar (1991) concluded the following about the effects of parental abduction on the family members left behind. They found that

"often a sibling who was not abducted by the other parent may feel rejected, fearful of being abducted, guilty at having escaped being snatched, or a number of other reactions depending upon family relationships and the circumstances of abduction" (p.223).

A majority of the respondents in this study learned about the abduction when the other parent failed to return the children after a scheduled visit (31%). Others reported that the abductor had contacted the respondent (19%), or one of the abductor's family members or friends (19%) had contacted them. Thirteen percent of the respondents went to the abductor's home, and found it empty. An equal proportion were either notified by the school (6%), notified by the police (6%), or when the abductor failed to appear at the custody hearing (6%). The large proportion of cases where the abducting parent failed to

return the child from a scheduled visit, continues to support the previous argument that abductor's most often take children during scheduled visits.

Seventy-five percent of the respondents in this study currently know the whereabouts of their children, or knew, while they were missing. The remaining twenty-five percent do not know the whereabouts of their children. Of the parents who know (knew) the whereabouts of their children, most reported that the children were taken out of the country (69%). Forty-four percent were taken to a country other than the United States.

Most of respondents in this sample reported no contact with the abductor while their children were missing (69%). One quarter of the sample reported that the abductor had made contact, and the remaining six percent reported that the abductor contacted the searching parent through someone else.

The majority of the respondents whose children have been recovered were contacted at some point by either the abductor or someone else (57%). The abductor made the contact in the majority of these cases (43%), while a smaller proportion made contact through someone else (14%). In each case contact was made over the telephone. In most cases, contact was made only once (80%), while contact was made weekly for the remaining twenty percent. In contrast to the experiences of parents who had recovered their children, most parents still searching for their children have not been contacted at all (89%).

The respondents were asked who they contacted once they learned of the abduction. All of the respondents reported the abduction to the police. The majority of the respondents (31%) also contacted each of the following: the police, a lawyer, family,

friends, the abductor's family, and at least one missing children's organization. A large proportion also contacted all of the above, with the exception of the abductor's family (19%).

Findings from this study indicate that most respondents contacted the police immediately. A large proportion also reported contacting a lawyer, and family and friends immediately. Less than half of the sample reported contacting a missing children's organization immediately. This latter finding is interesting and may explain the high proportion of international abduction cases in this study.

Research indicates that domestic abductions are more likely to be resolved than cases of international abduction. Parents may contact missing children's organizations when their attempts to recover their children fail. It is more likely that the parents contacting missing children's organizations are parents whose children have been taken out of the country. Barb Snider, who works for the Missing Children's Society of Canada confirmed this hypothesis. The sample for this study was gathered through missing children's organizations, thus it is likely that a high proportion of this population consists of parents whose children were taken abroad.

Cost of the Search

"Even if the children are recovered, the cost may easily run into tens of thousands of dollars and it may take many years for children to be located and custody to be regained" (Schetky and Haller, 1983: p.280).

The emotional and physical costs of parental abduction are profound. The search for a parentally abducted child can also be very costly. Respondents of this study reported that the approximate amount of money spent on the search ranged between

nothing (the respondent was on social assistance), to \$70,000. The average amount spent was approximately \$23,500. Most of the respondents (56%), spent over \$20,000.

It is highly probable that parents whose children are still missing, will spend more money before they recover their children. One searching parent reported spending \$70,000 and is still searching for his child. Another searching parent has already spent in excess of \$50,000. Many respondents like these have had to take on additional jobs and/or re-mortgage their homes. A number of these respondents have borrowed money from banks, and/or private loan companies with no idea of how they will repay the borrowed money. This supports the concept of the 'priceless child', and that a child is more than 'a possession'.

In some cases of recovered children, parents may be faced with the fact that their children have adapted to a new lifestyle or culture. Additionally, as will be discussed in the following chapters, the courts may award the abducting parent custody. Consequently, the searching parent is left with an exorbitant amount of debt, as well as tremendous grief and loss.

viii) The Child's Experience of the Abduction

In a majority of cases examined, abducted children were moved more than two times (31%). Nineteen percent of the children were taken to, and remained in, one location. Thirteen percent were moved more than ten times during the abduction. A further six percent were moved more than five times. Thirty-one percent of the respondents are unsure about the number of times the children have been moved, as their whereabouts are still unknown.

The abducting parent may change the child's name or appearance to avoid being found. In thirteen percent of the cases examined the abductor changed the child's appearance, by cutting and dying their hair. In twenty-five percent of the cases, the abductor changed the child's name(s). The surname was changed in 12.5% of the cases, and both names were changed in 12.5% of the cases. The proportion of respondents who know nothing about their child's whereabouts were not able to respond to either of these questions (25%).

The questionnaire also asked if the abducted children attempted to contact the searching parent. A majority of respondents indicated that the child did not attempt to contact the searching parent (88%). In a small proportion of the cases examined, the child wrote a letter to the searching parent (12%). Personal contact was made by the child only once.

There are numerous possibilities for why the child did not contact the searching parent. The most plausible is that the child is (was) too young. Although children may know their home phone numbers, many children do not know their area codes. Thus, it is likely that a child would not know how to telephone the searching parent, especially if they are taken out of their local area code, or out of the country.

The abductor may lie to the child to discourage attempts to contact the searching parent, or to explain why they have taken the child. For example, the abductors may tell the children that the searching parent has moved away, has abandoned them or, as some researchers have noted, the abductor may tell the children that the searching parent is dead (Abrahms, 1983).

When a parent lies to a child about the searching parent, they cause an enormous amount of grief for the child. This emotional manipulation is in these cases, a form of child abuse. Chapter five provides an in-depth discussion regarding this issue, as well as other factors supporting the notion that parental abduction is a form of maltreatment.

These findings highlight the turmoil abducted children are forced to live through. Psychologists report that a stable environment is essential for children in the early developmental stages (Grusec and Lytton, 1988). If a child is constantly 'on the run', it is difficult for them to establish a secure 'home base'. Furthermore, the likelihood of establishing long term friendships is minimal. When a child is constantly changing homes, schools, and friends, it is likely that the child will suffer emotional consequences. Psychologists Grusec and Lytton (1988) note the possible consequence of this type of lifestyle. They claim that, "*Uncontrollable changes in the child's environment such as a new residence, strained economic circumstances, and reduced availability of one parent takes a toll on their adjustment*" (p.413).

The emotional turmoil of abduction does not end once children are recovered. Researchers have found that the emotional impact of abduction lasts for months, even years after the children return home (Abrahms, 1983; Schetky and Haller, 1983; Senior et al. 1982). Parents who recovered their children provided information on the impact the abduction had on the children. These findings are presented in the next section.

ix) After the Abduction

A majority of researchers have concluded that the effects of parental abduction on children are traumatic (Abrahms, 1983; Gelles, 1980; Greif and Hegar, 1993; Janvier et al., 1990; Sagatun and Barrett, 1990; Schetky and Haller, 1983 ; Senior et al. 1982). Two

factors seem to primarily influence how children are affected by abduction. The first is the duration of the abduction. As discussed in chapter one, researchers have found that children are more likely to recover with minimal emotional scars if the abduction was of short duration. The longer the abduction, the more emotional or psychological impact it had on children (Finkelhor et al. 1991; Greif and Hegar, 1991).

The second factor influencing the impact abduction has on children's emotional well being, is their living conditions during the abduction. If the children were well cared for, with minimal disruption, they were less likely to be emotionally scarred from their experience (Finkelhor et al. 1991; Greif and Hegar, 1991). This section outlines the impact of abduction on the children in this study and compares these results with the other researchers.

Parents whose children had been recovered were asked additional questions about the after-effects of the abduction. The following discussion is based on the responses of parents who have found their children (44%). The shortest abduction was three weeks in duration, and the longest, six years. The average length of abduction for this sub-sample was one year and eleven months.

Most of the respondents reported a variety of behavioural changes in their children since the abduction. Fifty-seven percent reported emotional changes in their children. Forty-three percent reported that the children were more 'high strung' or tense. Twenty-seven percent reported that the children showed increased signs of anger. Twenty-seven percent reported that their children showed increased signs of aggression. Fourteen percent reported that the children appeared more fearful or anxious. Fourteen percent reported that their children appeared to have been neglected while away. Only

fourteen percent of the respondents who recovered their children reported no behavioural changes in their children. The behavioural changes reported by the respondents support the argument that the longer the child is missing the more negative the experience will be for the child (Finkelhor et. al.,1991; Greif and Hegar 1993). The average length of time children were missing in this study was almost two years.

When asked to elaborate on how the children were abused, 20% of the respondents reported signs of lack of medical care or education. Sixty percent of the respondents reported the abductor had emotionally tormented the child in some way. Twenty percent reported signs of neglect in their children, however, they were not specific as to what the 'signs of neglect' were. One survey respondent noted that *"my daughter was missing for six months, she had lost almost ten pounds by the time I found her. She threw up when she ate more than a little bit. She was not given her medication for asthma, and is still suffering the consequences"*.

Rex Forehand and his colleagues (1989) reported significant changes in children's functioning. They concluded that the children showed increased problems with behavioural conduct, learning problems, psychosomatic difficulties, and increased anxiety (p. 311). Both Sherman and Staff (1993), and Terr (1983) reported that after the abduction, the children in their studies showed signs of post traumatic stress syndrome. Therapists who worked with children and families after an abduction reported that the children had experienced very traumatic abductions (Schetky and Haller, 1983; Senior et al, 1982). They reported long lasting effects of regression, sleep disturbances, weight loss and anniversary reactions.

Senior et al.(1982) describe the behaviour of a two year old, who was abducted by his mother for five weeks.

“Upon his return, he had severe difficulty sleeping, he would awaken terrified and screaming. He urinated and defecated on the floor and had developed a marked aversion to the toilet. He cried uncontrollably, and fought frequently with his brother” (p.580).

These behaviours continued for over a year after the child was recovered, and was more apparent during the Christmas period (the anniversary of the abduction). These researchers concluded that the consequences of abduction are profound. This study illustrates the psychological trauma of an abduction on a pre-school age child.

These findings are consistent with other clinical research. Schetky and Haller (1983) reported the following behavioural changes of a recovered three year old girl, missing for two weeks: regressive behaviours, including wetting herself, acting frightened, as well as excessive anxiety, and a fear of rejection. They noted that *“she made several spontaneous references to the kidnapping, commenting that they had to speak in whispers and were not allowed to go near windows or doors” (p.280).*

These clinical evaluations indicate that children are affected by abduction, even those that last for relatively short periods of time. The behavioural changes exhibited by the two children referred to above, are indicative of traumatic experiences. Research also shows that behavioural changes in some recovered children are long term. Schetky and Haller noted that some children require ongoing therapy. Such was the case for seven year old Amy. *“Amy was seen in weekly therapy for over a year without much improvement” (p.281).*

Re-Abduction

Faced with the trauma and difficulties associated with recovering abducted children, and, in some cases, lack of response from law enforcement agencies, leads many searching parents to consider taking matters into their own hands. One of the subjects interviewed for this study indicated that she feels that at this point, her only option is to re-abduct her son. In chapter two the case studies provided by Livingstone (1992) reflect upon the extreme measures to which searching parents will take to recover their children. In each of these cases, the searching parent had to re-abduct their children. Research indicates that many children live in fear of abduction for many years after being recovered (Abrahms, 1983; Greif and Hegar, 1993).

Most of the parents in this study who have recovered their children fear that the abductor will attempt another abduction (80%). This is also part of the reason searching parents are difficult to locate, as many go into hiding after recovering their children. Some of the respondents to this survey were hesitant about pursuing further contact with me. Those who included a phone number stressed the importance of their anonymity.

Other researchers have also found that the searching parents feared a re-abduction. For example, Hegar and Greif (1993) indicated that 17% of the abductors in their sample had threatened to re-abduct their children. For some parents, living in constant fear of re-abduction can be overwhelming. Schetky and Haller (1983) reported a disturbing case in which the mother had threatened to kill the daughter so that the father could not take her away. *"Mrs. T. told A. that if her father ever attempted to take her away from her they would dress up in their best party clothes, paint up their faces, kill themselves and meet in eternity"* (p.282). These findings provide support as to the detrimental consequence of

abduction as a resolution of conflict between parents, and how children may be caught in the middle when family conflict occurs.

Recovered Children

An interesting follow-up pattern to abduction has been noted in this study as well as others. The searching parents in this study reported that 38% of the recovered children are now living with the abducting parent. These findings are higher than Hegar and Greif's (1993) study in which twenty-three percent of the recovered children were living with the abductor, and Forehand and his colleagues (1989) who reported that 29% of the recovered children were living with the abductor.

There are several possible explanations for these findings. In some cases, the abducting parent may be the custodial parent. Here, the courts or searching parent may decide that the child should remain in his/her care. Additionally, during the abduction, the relationship between the abductor and the children may have been strengthened to the point that the searching parent, or courts, felt that the best interest of the child was to remain in his/her present environment. This is the premise in which a majority of custodial decisions are based upon. The following chapter presents a discussion on the best interest of the child.

In cases of international abduction, the Hague Convention, a tool used to aid in the return of children taken out of the country, stipulates that the searching parent must make an application for the return of the child within one year of their abduction. After the one year stipulation, the courts may decide that the child is better off remaining in their present living arrangement. This poses a problem for parents who learn the whereabouts of their child after one year of abduction. Discussions on the Hague

Convention, and the return of the child are further discussed in an upcoming section on international abduction.

x) Motivation

This section describes the searching parent's perspective of the abductor's motive for the abduction. Information about the motivation behind the abduction is largely subjective because data are gathered from the searching parents. A common assumption regarding parental abduction is that vengeance is the primary motive (Abrahms, 1983; Sagatun and Barrett, 1990), whereas other researchers argue that the desire to be with the child motivated the abduction (Agopian, 1980; Greif and Hegar, 1994).

Most of the respondents in this study felt that the abductor planned the abduction in advance (88%). The remaining twelve percent felt that the abductor knew what s/he was doing, but felt that the abduction was spontaneous. Sixty-three percent indicated that the abductor exhibited suspicious behaviours before the abduction. One of the survey respondents indicated that *"the passports went missing before they were taken, and were found hidden in a backpack that was in his possession two weeks prior to the abduction."*

One of the interview subjects indicated that:

"he told me he was going to take the child. I took his threats seriously and tried to prevent it. I begged the judge to do something but he told me 'you are irritating me and you don't know how to behave in court, we have rules here'..I knew my husband would take him away."

If the judge had taken this respondent's concerns seriously, she may have her son with her now. He has been missing for almost a year, and she has no idea where he is. Judges and passport officials can play a crucial role in interfering with attempted

abductions. These issues are further discussed in the next section on international abduction.

Half the respondents indicated that they felt that the abductor's motives were based on a combination of factors including: the desire to hurt or seek revenge against the searching parent, pressure from family, and/or dissatisfaction with (pending) custodial decision. Thirty-eight percent felt that the primary motive was to hurt or seek revenge against the respondent. A small proportion (6%) indicated that pressure from the abductor's family and friends was the primary motivational factor, or because the abductor was in a new relationship or marriage (6%).

These findings are consistent with other studies. For example, Greif and Hegar (1993) concluded that a majority of searching parents report that the abductor's motive is primarily revenge (77%). Other respondents reported that the abductor was angry over the break-up of the marriage (23%), or under pressure from others (13%).

The questionnaire also asked if the abductor had provided an explanation for his/her actions. Thirty-one percent reported that the abductor indicated that the primary motive for the abduction was a desire to hurt, or seek revenge against, the searching parent. Thirteen percent stated that the abductors were dissatisfied with the (pending) custodial order. Six percent reported a combination of motives, such as anger over the break-up, a desire to seek revenge, and unhappiness with the judicial system. For the remainder of the sample, the abductor did not provide any explanations.

These findings are based on the perception of the searching parents. As such, they may be biased and misleading, for example, Greif and Hegar (1994) interviewed abducting parents who reported different reasons for their actions. In that study, fifty

percent of the abductors reported that they were motivated by the unresponsiveness of the court system. Seventy-five percent reported concerns about how the children were being raised. Twenty-five percent of the sample reported that they did not want their children to grow up as they did, without a mother. (p.284).

These researchers concluded that there are a combination of factors that may precipitate abduction. They include a strong bond with the child, unsatisfactory interaction with the courts or child welfare employees, as well as concerns about the well-being of the child. In contrast, other researchers argue that abduction is a purely selfish act. Most abductors do not recognize the psychological consequences of their actions on the children.

Each of these researchers provide evidence to substantiate their conflicting views on the motivation for abduction. In some cases parents may abduct their children out of genuine fear for their safety, or perhaps because the other parent is denying them their rightful access to see or maintain a relationship with their children. Again, these conflicting viewpoints establish a basis for showing that parental abduction results from a series of factors, which highlight the complexity and uniqueness of parental abduction.

II) INTERNATIONAL ABDUCTION

As the number of interracial marriages increases, so does the number of interracial divorces. Additionally, technological and social advancements have facilitated border crossings and international travel. As a result, international parental abductions have also increased. Each case of international abduction is unique, and therefore, difficult to research and make generalizations about.

The search for abducted children taken abroad is more complex. The searching parent is confronted with an additional set of obstacles, such as different cultural and religious beliefs, and/or foreign laws. When children are removed from their country of residence chances for recovery decrease. Hegar and Greif (1991) support this finding stating that, *“Co-ordinating a national search is a nightmarish experience, but when a boundary has been crossed, the difficulties in locating a child may be increased logarithmically”* (p.354).

The vulnerability of a child is further magnified when the abducting parent has family, or other ties, in another country. Vulnerability is maximized if a country has traditions or laws that may be hostile toward the searching parent, for example, a bias against the gender of the searching parent, or a stranger bias. The publication entitled International Abduction, by the Department of Foreign Affairs (1996) stated that *“in some countries children must obtain the permission of their father, and a married women the permission of her husband, to travel”* (p.5). In this case, the child may be subject to a different set of ‘laws’ and cultural practices which may not hold ‘the best interest of the child’ as a principal concern. For example, the child may be taken to a country dominated by a patriarchal system which may have a different concept of the ‘best interest of the child’.

i) Comparing Domestic and International Abduction

International migration and mobility has given rise to increasing numbers of international marriages. In consequence, there may be different or dual nationalities involved in the family relationship. Researchers have noted that different cultural norms or beliefs often contribute to conflict within the relationship (Dyer, 1987; Hegar and

Greif, 1991). Clayton (1975) supports this stating that “*whenever love develops between two people of different racial backgrounds, or merely different ethnic backgrounds, or religions, or social classes, complications are bound to arise*” (p.208).

As stated in the previous chapter, researchers have found differences in the profiles of domestic and international abductors. (Abrahms, 1983; Agopian, 1981; Finkelhor et. al., 1991; Hegar and Greif, 1991). Family values and traditions may differ between individuals in interracial marriages. Consequently, the possibility of conflict within these marriages increases. Unresolved conflict is often a motivational factor in parental abduction. The relationship between parental abduction and culture is extremely important in the investigation of international abduction.

Hegar and Greif (1994) discuss the reasons why interracial couples are likely to face higher levels of conflict. They claim that, “*Conflict in interracial marriages are precipitated by stress produced by lack of acceptance, differences in role expectations, disagreements about child rearing patterns, and cultural differences concerning the use of violence to resolve conflict*” (p.139).

The previous section noted that the abductor's gender was largely influenced by circumstances surrounding family dissolution, and patterns of custody. For example, when custody patterns tend to favour mothers, there is a higher proportion of male abductors. The analysis of gender as a factor in abduction indicates that the proportion of male abductors was higher than females in several studies, including the present one. (Abrahms, 1983; Agopian, 1981; Finkelhor et. al., 1991). Researchers have also noted differing trends when comparing domestic and international abductions. For example, Janvier et al (1990) found that abductors, in eighty one percent of international cases,

were male, compared with thirty nine percent of domestic abductors. In the present study, most of the abductors were male. Furthermore, most of the cases examined were also international abductions.

The findings from this study, in which the majority of cases were international abductions supports Greif and Hegar's (1991) findings that the profile of international abductors differs from that of domestic abductors. These researchers concluded that international abductors tended to be older than domestic abductors, with a mean age of thirty-seven. In the present study, most abductors were between 37 and 41 years old. The mean age of abductors in this study was higher than in other studies reviewed in which the majority of cases were domestic abductions.

Greif and Hegar (1991) also noted that international abductors were more educated than domestic abductors. They reported an average of 12.5 years of schooling for international abductors. The findings from the present study support this argument. Thirty-eight percent of the abductors had some college or university. A further nineteen percent had completed college or university. In addition, three quarters of the abductors in this study were born abroad. Again, this supports Greif and Hegar's conclusions that a majority of international abductors were born abroad. They also noted that these abductors were more successful in keeping their children away from the searching parent.

Abducted Children

Characteristics of children who are abducted and taken abroad are also different compared to children in domestic abduction cases. The present study found that the mean age of abducted children was higher than in other studies examined (6.7 years old). This supports Greif and Hegar's argument (1991) that children taken abroad tend to be older

than those abducted and kept domestically. They concluded that thirty-seven percent of the children abducted internationally were over eight years old. Furthermore, they concluded that in one third of the international abduction cases, entire family groups were taken. These family groups usually consisted of three or more children. In the present study, more than one child was abducted in fifty percent of the cases examined.

Motivation

Greif and Hegar (1991) reported that motivations differ in cases of international abduction. When flight was to a home country, the abductor's affinity for their country of origin, their familiarity with their culture, and the availability of empathetic friends and relatives seemed to play a major role. The motivation for these cases may be the desire to return to their home country combined with the desire to remain a consistent influence in the lives of their children. Research indicates that beliefs about child-rearing, parenting style, gender roles, and motivations for parenthood vary greatly by culture (Baptists, 1984; Hoffman, 1987; Greif and Hegar, 1994). One of the survey respondents stated that *"my husband's family was angry that I had been awarded primary custody of 'Tommy', they felt that he would not be raised with the proper religious (Muslim) beliefs. My husband didn't want to go home without my son, so he took him"*.

As previously stated, Canada's population is a mosaic of ethnic diversity, in consequence, so are Canadian families. In cases of interracial marriages, it is beneficial to investigate cultural differences which may contribute to the family conflict. These sources of conflict, if identified, may serve as possible indicators for abduction. Additionally, many abductions appear to occur because of anger between the couple. One potential source of this anger may be from a lack of understanding about different

cultural expectations, such as child-rearing beliefs. Greif and Hegar (1994) suggest that when couples from different cultural backgrounds become committed in a relationship, efforts should be made to help both partners understand cultural differences. This may serve as a way of decreasing future abductions (p.141).

ii) Custody Orders/ Dual Nationality

Canadian law provides that if there is no custody order, both parents are considered to have equal legal custody of a child. There are similar laws in other countries. In most provinces and territories, a parent can obtain an interim custody order if the other parent has taken their child. When children are taken out of the country, one of the biggest hurdles that searching parents face is the lack of recognition Canadian laws receive abroad. According to the Department of Foreign Affairs, Canadian Law and custodial orders are not directly enforceable abroad. (Department of Foreign Affairs, 1996: p.6). In the search for internationally abducted children, the searching parent is typically assisted by a variety of agencies. When the assistance of Canadian officials, lawyers, and other social agencies are required, the search for a missing child becomes a societal issue. This highlights another aspect of how parental abduction reaches beyond the scope of a personal family problem into a wider public sphere.

Many international child abductions involve parents and children who have citizenship status in Canada and other countries. Dual nationality is permissible under Canadian law. This poses serious barriers for the custodial parent, and for Canadian authorities in preventing child abductions to other countries. It also creates significant difficulties in having the abducted child returned to Canada. In the present study, of the cases where the respondent knew the location of their children, ninety-one percent of the

children were taken abroad. In fifty percent of these cases, the abductor took the children back to his/her home country. These findings provide support that there is a relationship between parental abduction and family culture. The high proportion of international abduction cases in the present study indicates that this is a significant problem with respect to parental abduction in Canadian society. It also highlights the relative ease in which a parent can take a child out of the country. This may be reflective of neglect with regard to passport attainment, and enforcement, or the consequence of allowing dual nationality to remain an option.

iii) Return of The Child: The Hague Convention

When a Canadian child is abducted to another country, the Consular Operations and Emergency Services Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade work with Canadian diplomatic missions abroad to assist in the return of the child. However, this assistance will only be provided with an explicit request by the searching parent in person, or by a person authorized in writing to act on his/her behalf.
(Department of Foreign Affairs, 1996: p.8)

International mobility of children poses an additional challenge to the problem of parental abduction. The international community has struggled for many years with problems encountered in the attempt to enforce custody orders in other countries (Dyer, 1987; Jones, 1981; Nichols, 1987). Substantial steps have been taken in order to deal with the increasing number of parental abductions. In 1980, the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction was drafted in an attempt to minimize the problem of parental abduction. The Convention entered into force on December 1,

1983, however, at that time, only Canada, France and Portugal ratified with the Convention.

The Convention governs the return of children who have been abducted and taken to another country from their pre-abduction country. Between member countries, the Convention's primary objective is to ensure the prompt return of an abducted or wrongfully detained child to his/her country of habitual residence. (DeHart, 1993: 1). According to the Department of Foreign Affairs (1996), approximately forty-five countries are signatory to the Convention.

Under this treaty, there is an obligation for the country in possession of the child to return an abducted child below the age of sixteen provided that the application is made within one year of the abduction. After a one year period, the court is still obliged to return the child, however, the recovery of children becomes more problematic. For example, the court can refuse to return the child if the individual resisting the return can demonstrate that the child has settled in his/her new environment.

Eighty percent of the respondents in this study reported that they were aware of the Hague Convention. Fifty-six percent of the respondents who knew the whereabouts of their children, indicated that the country to which their children were taken, was ratified with the Hague Convention. Where respondents reported that the country in which their children were taken had ratified with the Hague Convention, eighty percent said that they felt that this convention helped or was helping, with the return of their children. Twenty percent felt the convention had no effect.

Countries Ratified with the Hague

As of January 1996, the Convention applies between Canada and the following countries:

Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Belize, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bukina Faso, Chile, Croatia, Denmark, Ecuador, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Honduras, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Saint Kitts & Nevis, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States.

In some of the above mentioned countries, the Convention may or may not apply to dependent territories. In cases of international abduction, it is important to verify whether and where the Convention will apply. Canada's involvement was negotiated and co-ordinated with provincial and territorial governments, thus the terms of the Convention are extended to all provinces and territories.

If the application is not made within one year from the time the child went missing, the child may not be returned to his/her native country. As previously mentioned there are several possible reasons that a child may not be returned. A child may be settled in his/her new environment; the child is returning to a situation likely to result in abuse or persecution; or the child is sixteen years of age or older (Cole, 1993: p.90). The one year application requirement poses a major obstacle for searching parents who do not know the whereabouts of their children.

In a majority of the cases examined for this study, the children were taken out of the country (63%). However, a large proportion of respondents still searching for their children (31%), do not know if the child has been taken out of the country or not. Thus, it is possible that the proportion of children taken out of Canada is actually higher than

reported. If these parents do not find out where their children are within a one year period, the potential benefits of the Hague Convention decreases.

Countries Not Party To The Hague Convention

While the convention is a useful tool, there are a large number of countries that have not ratified. Consequently, minimal assistance is available for children taken to these non-ratified countries. In the Ottawa Citizen it was noted that, “*approximately three-quarters of all nations that have not signed the convention, meaning that sons and daughters spirited to places such as China, India, Jordan and other countries are virtually beyond the reach of Canadian style justice*” (Sunday, September 28, 1997).

Children abducted to countries not ratified with the Hague Convention are the least likely to be recovered. If a child has been taken to a non-signatory country, it is possible to take other legal action that may help in the recovery of a child. Parents in this situation must obtain a lawyer in the country where the child has been taken. Courts in other countries, must, as they do in Canada, decide on custodial issues on the basis of their own domestic laws.

iv) Bringing Recovered Children Back to Canada

Returning an abducted child is a major concern for the authorities as well as the custodial parent. International and Interpol networking of police and searching agencies are vital to the successful return of the child to his/her home country prior to the abduction. However, if a child has been away for an extended period of time, other issues of reunification require special attention. For example, the child may or may not remember the searching parent. One of the investigators consulted for this study is actively involved in the recovery of children. She stated that “*rarely is a reunion happy*”.

Images of the child running and jumping into the searching parents arms is more often a dramatization. Authorities have to understand the emotional issues involved in returning a child to the searching parent. The actual reunion involves helping the abducted child and the searching parent form a relationship. In some cases, child welfare authorities put children into foster homes while mediating the reunion process. However, researchers note that this can also cause additional emotional distress on the child and the searching parent (Greif and Hegar, 1993).

Discussion

Children are the most vulnerable family members when conflict remains unresolved. Unresolved conflict is one of the primary motivational factors in parental abduction. In cases where the abductor has close ties to another country, the vulnerability of the child is maximized. Parental abduction is always difficult to resolve, but the difficulty increases when the abductor takes the child to a foreign country.

The relationship between parental abduction and culture becomes more evident in the cases of international abduction. For example, it is more likely that the abductor is motivated by the desire to remain actively involved in his/her child's life. Additionally, abducting parents may be motivated by the desire to have their children brought up with the traditions and values practised in their native country. Furthermore, under the normative values of his/her culture, the abductor may be viewed as a bad or neglecting parent for leaving his/her child with the other parent.

Research also indicates that international abduction cases present additional obstacles for finding and returning abducted children. The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of Child Abduction is a valuable recovery tool, however, there are

limitations. Presently only forty-five countries are signatory to the Hague Convention. The complexity of international abduction is further magnified when children are taken to countries not ratified with the Convention. These cases are usually the most difficult to resolve.

Findings from the present study indicate that a high proportion of children abducted by a parent are taken out of the country. As such, one of the primary objectives in the development of prevention and intervention measures should be to address the relative ease in which children can be taken out of the country. One of the primary mediums through which better preventive measures could be implemented is through the processing and enforcement of passport regulations.

In this study, respondents were asked if the abducted child has his/her own passport. Forty-four percent of the respondents reported that their children had their own passports. Thirty-one percent indicated that the child was listed on both of the parents' passports. Forty-two percent of the respondents had obtained their children's passports.

One quarter of the sample reported that the abducting parent had obtained the passport. These respondents were asked if they had been notified about the application for the child's passport. Sixty percent reported that they were notified when the abducting parent obtained the child[ren]'s passport, whereas, the remaining forty percent were not notified.

Passport applications for children under sixteen years old require custodial information, as well as, the signature of both parents. It is then stated that the other parent 'may' be contacted about the application. As previously stated, a large proportion of the searching parents (40%) were not notified when the abducting parent obtained the

passport. These findings indicate that the procedures stated for the successful processing of a passport application are not followed. The application requires the signature of both parents, however, a large proportion of this sample indicated that they were not notified about the application being made. Findings from this study suggest that a large proportion of abducted children are taken out of the country. Therefore, strict regulations should be implemented and enforced to hinder the present ease of obtaining travel documents for children. This is one way to decrease the occurrence of international abduction. Research indicates that a large proportion of parents abduct the children prior to final custodial decisions being made. Withholding the parent's passports until final custody decisions are in place is another possible way of deterring parental abduction.

The implementation of prevention measures should include a detailed investigation into the role and procedures of those involved in processing passport applications, as well as airline employees who check passports at the airport. Officials working in this area should be made aware of the complexities involved in international abduction.

International abduction results partially from the consequences of vague regulations, or neglect of enforcing proper procedures such as notifying the other parent of the passport application. Additional policy recommendations are presented in the following chapter. The following chapter also provides a discussion on the nature of parental abduction in Canada using data gathered through the survey, and interviews.

Chapter Five: PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF PARENTAL ABDUCTION

An investigation into parental abduction from both an individual and societal level exemplifies the depth and complexity of the problem. From a micro level of analysis, parental abduction contributes to an already strained environment. Furthermore, it contributes to the existing conflict between parents, and creates additional confusion and strain for the children involved. For children, the sudden, and in some cases dramatic, change in lifestyle abduction is emotionally traumatic for children, and for searching parents. This chapter provides a summary of the findings from the survey, and from the telephone and face-to-face interviews.

i) Profile of the Abducting Parent

One of the main objectives of this study was to establish profiles of parents most likely to abduct their own children, and children most likely to be abducted. These profiles have been established through an analysis of the survey responses. Therefore the findings presented in the following sections are reflective of such. Findings indicate that abductors tend to be male, and between the ages of 37 to 41 years old. Abductors are more likely to be born outside of Canada (75%). Abducting parents are likely to have at least some college or university education. The income level of abducting parents tends to be either less than \$15,000, or between \$25,000 to \$30,999. More often than not, abductors have no prior criminal record.

One of the most significant findings from this study is that the majority of abductors and respondents were born outside of Canada. Also, a majority of the cases examined for this study were international abductions. One possible explanation for this is that abductors who were born abroad may be more likely to take the children to their

native country. Additionally, it is more difficult to recover children once they are taken out of the country. These cases are more difficult to resolve, and therefore, it is more likely that unresolved cases are referred to missing children's organizations.

Few of the missing children's organizations have investigative teams. The Missing Children's Society of Canada offers investigative help to searching parents. They handle a large amount of international abduction cases. Since a large proportion of this sample was gathered through the Missing Children's Society files, it is likely that the high proportion of abductors born outside Canada, and the high rate of international abductions are more representative of how the sample was gathered rather than the norm.

However, it would be a mistake to conclude that abductions occur only when individuals are from other ethnic backgrounds, or interracial couples. Greif and Hegar (1994) argued that interracial couples are more susceptible to marital conflict, and consequently parental abduction. Further supporting this argument, Passanante (1996) states that *"the increase in the number of marriages between persons of different cultures has resulted in a corresponding increase in the number of divorces involving an international family"* (p.678). While results from the present study support this argument, further investigation is required.

Findings from this study also reflect the cultural diversity that exists in Canadian families. These findings highlight the heterogeneity of Canadian families, and provide support that most definitions of the family do not adequately address the diversity that exists in our society today. In addition, these findings suggest that there is a relationship between the increase in international marriage and divorce and international abduction. The high level of cultural diversity in this sample may be a reflection of the way in which

the sample was gathered. Further research using larger samples, and different methods of data collection would clarify this issue. Other studies may provide different conclusions, or they may support the findings from this study.

With regard to family relationships, it is more likely that the relationship between the respondent and the abductor has dissolved at the time of the abduction. Parents are more likely to be separated rather than married or divorced. Additionally, abductions are more likely to occur once a custody order has been made. In accordance with current custodial trends, mothers are more likely to have custody: sole, primary, or interim. Fathers are more likely to abduct when there is a legal custody order in place, while mothers tend to abduct prior to or when there was a pending custody order. This pattern indicates a higher risk period for the possibility of parental abduction which should also be noted and considered by individual and legal authorities as they outline the conditions of their child custody decisions.

Prior to custody decisions being made, fathers may abduct out of fear of losing their relationship with their children, or frustrated with the custodial decision perpetuated by society's belief that children are better off with their mothers. In contrast, mothers who are not awarded custody may abduct because they fear being stigmatized as an incompetent mother. Again the contrast between the findings from this study and previous ones may be reflective of cultural influences. Fathers who abduct after custody decisions may be motivated by their native cultural or religious beliefs which follow strong patriarchal notions. Cultural influences also may motivate mothers to abduct prior to obtaining a legal custody order. If their culture traditionally awards custody to the

fathers, the mother may feel that similar traditions apply in Canada, which may motivate these mothers to abduct the child before legal custody is determined.

Findings indicate that there are patterns as to the gender of the abductor and the timing of the abduction. There is also a relationship between the gender of the abductor and the type of custody order in effect at the time of the abduction. Current custodial trends tend to favour mothers as either the primary or sole parent. For example, Statistics Canada (1996) reported that mothers are still being awarded custody in a majority of cases. In 1996, eighty-two percent of mothers were awarded sole or primary custody, as compared to eight percent of fathers. Joint custody was awarded in ten percent of the cases. These statistics provide support for the argument that when custodial patterns favour mothers in custody decisions, there is a higher proportion of male abductors. Findings from this study provide support for this argument. A majority of the abductors were male (63%), and in the cases where a legal custody order was in place, a majority of the custodial decisions favoured the mother as primary caregiver (75%).

ii) Profile of Abducted Children

Findings from this study indicate multiple abductions occur in equal proportion to single abductions. Multiple abductions occur when more than one child is taken by the abductor. Boys are more likely to be abducted than girls. Again, these findings provide support to the patriarchal premise that male children should be cherished more than females because they are responsible for the continuation of the family line. Children are most likely to be abducted between the ages of four to seven years old. It is less likely that younger children will be abducted as they require extensive supervision and care. It

is also difficult to conceal the whereabouts of older children. Unless carefully supervised, adolescent children may attempt to contact the searching parent or run away.

There are temporal trends to parental abductions. Parental abductions are more likely to occur during the summer months of June, July, or August, with a peak in July. Furthermore, abductions are likely to take place on a Saturday between 8:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. Since the majority of abductors did not have custody of the children, these timings reflect periods when children are most likely to be visiting with the non-custodial parent. As such, the children would be readily accessible to the abducting parent. In further support of this, findings from the present study indicate that children are likely to be in the care of the abducting parent at the time of the abduction. In these circumstances, the searching parent is likely to learn of the abduction when the abductor fails to return the child from a scheduled visit.

Abducted children are more likely to be taken out of the country. One possible explanation for this finding is that the majority of the abducting parents were born outside of Canada. Upon dissolution of the family relationship s/he may have decided to return to his/her native country. It is also likely that children will be moved around several times during the abduction. This type of lifestyle is not conducive to the warm and stable environment that children require to develop emotionally. Tedisco and Paludi (1996) argue that “*children often live under cruel circumstances, almost paralleling life as a fugitive, with frequent changes of residences and names*” (p.12).

Additionally, a majority of children are likely to experience some form of emotional trauma either during, or as a consequence of, the abduction. The parents of recovered children were asked to describe their children's behaviour since the abduction.

Most reported that their children were “*fearful and anxious, high-strung and tense, and showing increased anger and aggression*”. One of the respondents from the survey noted that each child had a different reaction, however, “*all were withdrawn, they are still fearful and anxious*”. After being separated from his children for seven years, one father noted that “*the abduction is a painful subject for them, and they try to avoid it. They are withdrawn and appear to use silence as a defence mechanism to protect them from unpleasant experiences*”.

A majority of data on the experiences of abducted children come from clinical reports and a small number of interviews with recovered children (Abrahms, 1983; Schetky and Haller, 1983; Senior et al, 1982). In the present study, the data is based on the searching parent’s perspective. As such, further studies should attempt to gain a sample of recovered children, this would facilitate a more objective understanding of how parental abduction affects children. In addition, this would also allow for an investigation into the long-term impact of parental abduction.

Gaining access to such a sample would be difficult. Children would have to be old enough to understand what is being asked of them, and parents would have to grant permission to question the children. Many parents do not want to remind their children of the past, they would rather the children put the experience behind them.

iii) Interview Data

The survey questionnaires provided significant insight into the patterns of parental abduction in Canada. The following data gathered through face-to-face, or telephone interviews provided a deeper understanding of how searching parents are affected when their children are abducted by the other parent. Additionally, through these interviews

information regarding the unique aspects of each case of parental abduction was established.

The experiences of each of the subjects interviewed were different and therefore, each interview provided some additional insight into the searching parent's experiences and perceptions of parental abduction¹. In three of the five interviews, the subject was no longer living with the abductor at the time of the abduction. Three of the five subjects have recovered their children. However, only one of these three subjects has custody of the child.

The data from these interviews provide significant insight into the nature of parental abduction. They also provide support to negate the fact that parental abduction occurs only after a relationship has dissolved. A recurring theme in each of the interviews was the respondent's frustration with the lack of police response, and the Canadian judicial system which according to these subjects, tends to ignore the problem of parental abduction.

If the family unit is still intact prior to the abduction, the nature of the problem is more difficult to discern. The only way to capture the true nature of the problem is to examine the family relationship prior to the abduction. Data from the interviews conducted for this study suggest that for the family relationships that were still intact, domestic violence, pressure from family, or different child rearing beliefs appear to be motivational factors that precipitated the abductions.

Naomi gave up her career and life in Canada, to move to one of the states in the

United Arab Emirate (hereon in as U.A.E.) to be with her husband and son who had moved there four months prior. Their relationship in Canada was scarred by physical abuse. She worked while her husband stayed home and took care of their son. She hoped that the move would improve her marriage.

“He used to drink and was abusive when we lived in Canada. I was hoping things would change because they don’t allow alcohol there. I didn’t mind giving it a shot, you know, a new life, a new country, a new change. I think I did it to save my marriage, because it wouldn’t have continued for very long the way it was going. He left, and we still talked on the phone, and he sent me my visa”
(Interview. Dec.3/97).

The day Naomi arrived in U.A.E. her husband beat her. Four days after her arrival her husband abandoned her.

“Four days after I arrived my husband and his brother me off at a Bazar. When I went back to meet him at the office he was gone, I was ordered out of the house by the man who sponsored us. He told me that a single woman could not stay there, he didn’t know where my husband and son were. He did not care.”

Naomi followed her husband through five countries, and finally recovered her son. However, she lives in constant fear of another abduction. She says that *“next time he won’t underestimate me like he did this time. He will be more careful, and I am sure that if he takes ‘Alan’ I will never see him again”* (Interview. Dec/97). When asked about her husband’s motive, Naomi is still unsure about why her husband fled with her son, especially since he had four months prior to her arrival to sever the ties between them. She only suspects that the brutal beating her first night there, and her unwillingness to be a subservient wife, especially in a patriarchal country, encouraged her husband’s actions.

¹ Interview subjects names have been changed for writing to ensure anonymity.

Conflict arises between couples when they have different beliefs with regard to child rearing. This appeared to be the primary motive for another subject. Marlene came home from work one day to an empty house. Her husband had taken their two-year old daughter and left. She did not see her daughter for twenty-three years. Tension between the couple had escalated with regard to how the child should be raised; her husband wanted the daughter to be raised under traditional Jewish faith. Marlene did not agree.

For twenty-three years Marlene had no contact from the abductor, she did not know her daughter's whereabouts, nor if she was still alive. Her daughter found her last year, and they have spent the past year trying to form a relationship. According to the Marlene:

"My daughter is very hostile, and still believes that I didn't want her. She thinks that if I really wanted her I would have found her. She was in Israel, how could I have known? She is angry with me for missing out on all the special moments in her life. She is now an adult. It is difficult to form a relationship under these circumstances. I mean she was two years old when my ex took her. For the past twenty-three years I have lived a continuous nightmare, I am beyond broke, both financially and emotionally. No one can truly understand the horror of this lifestyle. He was so abusive to me, and I lived in fear that he would be the same with her" (Interview. Jan/98).

Two common themes emerged from these interviews. Both these subjects were in abusive relationships, and both defied the cultural or religious traditions imposed by their husbands. These two findings reflect the presence of cultural conflict and parental abduction.

Couples who were separated prior to the abduction were aware of conflicting issues that caused the dissolution of the relationship. In such circumstances, the motivation for the abduction may have been unhappiness about the separation, or fear of pending custodial decisions, and/or the potential costs for lawyers and other court related

expenses. Some parents opt to abduct instead of gambling on an unpredictable verdict, or unhappiness with the outcome of a custody hearing. In an interview with Abrahms (1983), a three- time abductor who appealed the custody decision four times stated *"stealing my kids was the only way. I tried to go through the courts and it didn't work"* (p.132).

Most respondents in this study reported spite or revenge as the primary motive for the abduction. A large proportion also indicated that fear of pending custody decisions, or dissatisfaction with the current decision was the primary motive for the abduction.

One of the subjects interviewed indicated that his wife's fear of the pending custody decision motivated her to take their son and leave the country. He learned of the abduction when she didn't show up at the custody hearing. Doug has not had contact with her or his son since, that was two years ago. He noted the lack of police response, and his frustration with the Canadian criminal justice system. He feels like his case is *"falling through the cracks"*, stating that:

"The local police detachment will not register my son as missing because the mother has obtained a custody order in Florida. Even the Sergeant of the RCMP Missing Children's Registry said that the child should be registered on the computer, however, they need the local police force to hand over the case..the child's mother left my son, six years old, alone all night while she worked at her job in a strip club, she was charged with neglect and fined \$150.00...This is not justice, or protection for children" (Interview. Jan/98).

These three interviews provided insight into cases in which abduction occurs prior to custodial orders being placed. However, current policies on parental abduction focus on post-custodial cases. As such, these policies neglect a large proportion of children who are abducted from intact families, such as the first two subjects interviewed.

Additionally, cases where the family relationship has dissolved but no custodial decisions have been made, are also neglected.

From a legal perspective, before each of these cases can be considered as parental abduction, the searching parents must first obtain a legal custody order. Furthermore, some police departments require proof of ‘intent to deprive’ before pursuing a case of parental abduction. This takes time, which consequently gives the abductor more time to flee with the children. One of the subjects interviewed said that *“one of the biggest hurdles aside from getting my son back, is getting people to recognize this as a problem”* (Interview. Jan/98). Unlike stranger abduction, the assumption is that as a family member (ie. a parent) the abductor will not be abusive, therefore, the child is being safely attended, while official custody is decided, and quick action is not necessary.

The other two interview subjects had a custody order in place at the time of the abduction. One of the subjects interviewed had primary custody when her son was abducted, the other had weekend visitation. Natalie was granted primary custody of her son, and her ex-husband was granted ‘liberal’ visitation. On Easter, the father picked the younger son, leaving the older sibling (who was not the abductor’s biological son) alone. Natalie has not seen her son since. In the interview she stated that *“It takes too long for the courts to process and provide official documents, I did not receive the official papers saying that I had primary custody till my child was missing.”* (Interview. Dec/97).

Natalie suspected that her estranged husband would do this, and expressed her disgust with the justice system.

"I knew that he was going to do this. I asked the judge to withhold his passport. He refused, maybe if he would have listened to me I would have my son now. The justice system doesn't take these things seriously. It is like they don't even care. It seems like nobody really cares" (Interview. Dec/97).

The fifth subject interviewed had visitation rights, and spent every weekend with his daughters. One day he went to pick them up and found the apartment empty. After six years and approximately sixty thousand dollars, Aaron found his daughters in California. Like the other interview subjects, he regards the justice system as negligent in their response to parental abduction. He stated that

"the police laughed at me when I asked them to investigate, they told me that she's probably just moved and hasn't contacted you yet. I had to get a lawyer to contact them and provide proof that I was granted visitation rights and even then they didn't bother much" (Interview. Feb/98).

Both Natalie and Aaron were disappointed with the lack of police response, and regard the Canadian judicial system as 'ambivalent'. In these circumstances, the generally adversarial and highly emotional nature of the resulting custody disputes exacerbated the effects of abduction. These cases provide support to the tenet that for the most part, parental abduction is still regarded as a 'private' family matter.

In other circumstances, desperate parents, frustrated by the time, expense, delay and inefficacy of the legal system, have decided to take matters into their own hands, and abduct their children back (Greif and Hegar, 1993; Passanante, 1996). One father noted:

"The system requires that one parent, or both parents, but up the other to win. I'm not sure what the prize is. The men get their homes, children, and their pride taken away. Suddenly a man has little or no say in his child's life. I am one who, out of desperation, resorted to stealing my child. I know how emotionally devastating a divorce can be. Attorneys are a large part of the trauma, as are the courts, which still live in the nineteenth century" (Abrahms. 1983: p.133).

There is a lot of debate surrounding the motives of parental abduction. Some researchers argue that abducting a child, and denying them the opportunity to maintain a relationship with the other parent, is not a loving act. These researchers situate children as pawns, used in a battle between parents (Abrahms, 1983; RCMP, 1996). In contrast, other researchers maintain that motives for abduction tend to revolve around fear for the child's safety, unhappiness with the court decision concerning custody and visitation, anger, and reaction to the other parent's threats of abduction. (Greif and Hegar, 1994).

Research has provided support that there is a relationship between the gender of the abductor, and the type of custodial order in place at the time of the abduction (Abrahms, 1983; Agopian, 1980; Greif and Hegar (1991, 1993). In the present study, the majority of abductors were fathers, while a majority of mothers had custody of the children. This would support the tenet that societal beliefs regarding gender roles may also be considered as a motivational factor for parental abduction. For example, if the father is granted custody, the mother may feel that she will be subjected to recrimination from others. Abrahms (1983) concluded that *"women tend to steal out of anger, embarrassment, and a sense of entitlement, since only one out of ten mothers lose custody"* (p.138).

In contrast, Abrahms (1983) notes that fathers may be motivated by frustration with the justice system. *"When a father is prevented from visiting his children or is reduced to minimal visitation, but is still required to pay support to both the mother and child, the resentment and frustration may lead him to steal his offspring, as one father stated 'if I can't solve the problem legally, I will solve it illegally' "* (p.136).

There are measures that could be taken to decrease the number of abductions motivated by the slow and/or unresponsiveness of the court system. For example, research indicates that mediation may be helpful in expediting court processes, or ensuring that the concerns of all the individuals involved are addressed. Taking steps to address these problems as they arise may facilitate prevention of parental abduction.

Other research indicates that the motive for cases of international abduction may be in part a product of the emotional stress that a parent experiences knowing that his/her children are being brought up outside his/her culture. Hegar and Greif (1994) argue that research findings from interracial marriages are clear such that, "*the patterns of ethnic belief and behaviour that are typical in the country of origin often continue to influence the immigrant who marries someone from a different cultural background in the country of adoption*" (p.137).

A plausible explanation for the gender patterns in the present study is that father may have been motivated by cultural or religious traditions from their native country. For example, in a lot of Muslim countries, the fathers are usually awarded custody, especially if the children are male. In the present study a majority of the abducted children were male, as were the abductors born outside Canada. Other possible motivations include: different child-rearing beliefs (Faulkner, 1983; Hoffman, 1987), lack of acceptance of the interracial marriage (Faulkner, 1983), and differences in role expectation (Cohen, 1982).

Discussion

Both the research literature reviewed and data gathered through the survey and

interviews reflect the wide spectrum in which parental abductions occur. According to Greif and Hegar (1993), "*Abductions occur for a variety of reasons, from the narcissistic to the heroic*" (p.270). Some families were still intact at the time of the abduction, some recently separated, while others divorced for several years. Some abductions last for weeks, others many years.

The nature of parental abduction is primarily rooted in interpersonal conflict. Families that were still intact at the time of the abduction, experienced conflict of some sort. Furthermore, data from this study provide support for the argument that conflict and different beliefs, whether religious, cultural or child rearing, are some of the primary causes of marital dissolution, and in consequence, parental abduction (Abrahms, 1983; Greif and Hegar, 1993, 1994; Passanate, 1996).

The circumstance that precipitates the abduction may also provide knowledge about the motivation. For example, another circumstance in which international abduction occurs is when the child[ren] visits another country with the consent of both parents, once in the other country, they are prevented from leaving. A pamphlet entitled 'Cross-Cultural Marriages: Should You or Your Child Visit the Country of the Other Parent?', published by the U.S. State Department (1982), advised that

"A person who has assimilated a second culture may find a return to his or her roots traumatic and may feel a pull to shift loyalties back to the original culture. A person's personality may change when s/he returns to the place where they grew up" (p.2).

Betty Mahoody's book and movie 'Not Without My Daughter' provides an account of such an experience.

The history of the relationship between the parents prior to the dissolution of the family also provides potential indicators of motivation for the abduction. Agopian (1980) argued that the family unit is considerably more crime prone than previously conceived (p.13). Findings from this study provide support for the premise that the family environment is not always loving, stable, and safe (Abrahms, 1983; Agopian, 1980; Greif and Hegar, 1993). The relationship between the history of family violence and parental abduction is important as it may provide insight into circumstances precipitating the abduction, as well as motivational factors.

The relationship between parental abduction and domestic violence has only received minimal attention thus far. Results from the present study indicate that most of the abductors exhibited some sort of abusive behaviour while they were with the searching parent. This provides support for the argument that there is a relationship between parental abduction and family violence (Agopian, 1980; Finkelhor, 1991). Greif and Hegar (1993) also support this premise stating that *"in our study, the incidence of marital violence is unusually high...Cultural, religious, and economic differences were present. Most notably, these marriages seemed to be marred by violence and substance abuse"* (p.31).

Some abductors who have a history of domestic violence may abduct the children as a form of power. They abduct the children to show who has the upper hand. This would support the findings of the researchers at the University of New Hampshire who stated that, *"the chief cause of family violence of all types is the abuse of power, or the wish of the stronger member to control the weaker one"* (In: Abrahms. 1983: p.131). In

contrast, the recipient of the abusive behaviour may be motivated to abduct his/her children out of fear.

Further research is required to establish the extent of the relationship between domestic violence and parental abduction. However, these findings highlight an additional area in which prevention measures could be implemented. If the problem of domestic violence is brought to the attention of police or child welfare workers, legal steps should be taken immediately to protect the child, not only from abuse, but also from the possibility of abduction.

Abducting parents may say they abduct for their kids' sake, but research indicates that, in a lot of cases, their motives are malicious, not altruistic (Abrahms, 1983; Greif and Hegar, 1993). Some abductors view abduction as a last resort. Some have tried the system, while others evade it. (Abrahms, 1983). If the motive for abduction is revenge, it is a successful ploy. As one missing children's organization representative noted *"Searching parents worry and wonder, constantly tormented by this act. It is a revenge far sweeter and longer-lived than a beating or even a murder, for it never ends"* (Interview: Aug./97).

This perception is often held and supported by legal authorities who tend to minimize parental abduction as a civil issue that does not require immediate legal or criminal action, thereby validating such behaviour. This is further discussed in the following chapter. The next chapter discusses the rights of the child, parental abduction as a social problem, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Six: SOCIAL ASPECTS OF PARENTAL ABDUCTION

Parental abduction is rooted in unresolved conflict within the family, and is a result of changing family and social trends. The abduction of a child by a parent is both a family, and a social problem. As such, the investigation of parental abduction is embedded in a variety of disciplinary boundaries, such as sociology, psychiatry, social work, and law.

The effects of abduction on children, and on society should be of primary importance in the investigation of parental abduction. At a congress session in the United States (1990), Dr. Thomas Harries stated that "*no child victim of parental kidnapping escapes from severe and prolonged, if not permanent, psychic damage as the result of being taken from the other parent*" (In: Passante. 1996: p.678).

This chapter examines parental abduction as a social problem. Gaining an understanding of parental abduction, under what circumstances it occurs, and the consequences thereof, will enable society to respond to this perplexing social phenomenon. Parental abduction requires an in-depth understanding of the circumstances that precipitate abduction, as well as the impact of abduction on children, family members left behind, and society as a whole. With this knowledge it is possible to develop and implement prevention measures that would serve to deter future abductions; as well as intervention measures to recover abducted children, and help the individuals affected deal with the impact of abduction.

i) Rights Of The Child

If the proportion of stranger abductions was as high as the current proportion of parental abductions, it would receive a significant amount of attention. Research

indicates that abduction is a traumatic experience for a child, whether the abductor is a parent or not (Abrahms, 1983; Greif and Hegar, 1994; Schetky and Haller, 1983). It is society's responsibility to protect children. In Canadian society, the 'rights of a child' are said to be of primary importance. Yet, because of the perception of family as a nurturing place in which children are lovingly supported and guided into adulthood, the consequences of parental abduction may be masked. Thus, further studies of parental abduction are needed to bring this social problem to the surface.

Khaki (1994) argues that a discussion about the rights of any member of society must include a discussion about responsibility (p.12). With respect to the rights of children, the responsibility to ensure that their rights are not ignored is the responsibility of both the family, and society. Khaki outlines the rights of children. "*Children need to be given all the elements which allow for survival. Their right to live becomes the responsibility of parents or others to provide food, shelter, warmth and an emotionally stable, loving environment*" (p.12).

Policies have been set forth that outline the rights of children, mainly that the most instinctive, universal rights are the rights of physical and emotional protection. With regards to parental abduction, some of the circumstances abducted children are exposed to may be physical and mental violations of their natural rights. According to the literature reviewed, parental abduction is an infringement on children's rights (Doek, 1996; Khaki, 1994). However, society does not view parental abduction in this light. In consequence, the rights of children, or the infringement of these basic rights are ignored. If it remains to be trivialized as a 'family problem', it will never gain the public attention or understanding that it deserves.

ii) The Impact of Abduction on Children

"Children abducted by a parent, similar to those abducted by strangers, lose trust in their world and feel emotionally abandoned by the adults - their parents - who are most important to their protection and recovery" (Tedisco and Paludi.1996: p.13).

Whether the abductor is a stranger or a parent, at minimum, children suffer some emotional distress. The accumulation of experiences abducted children are exposed to are traumatic. Children are abruptly uprooted from their life, family, and friends. For many abducted children who live on the run, there is no stability. They are moved around, some have their names and appearances changed. Children whose names are changed are forced to live with an additional emotional burden of lies. Research indicates that these children are less likely to develop relationships for fear of slipping up. Abrahms (1983) describes the life of an abducted child.

"Kids would invite him to parties and he was never permitted to go. His father wouldn't allow him to identify with other kids out of fear that someone would catch on. They moved around a lot – from New York to Oregon to California to Utah to Massachusetts. They finally got a room which they shared with another man in a roominghouse. This man had a girlfriend who would cook for them once in a while. Other than that, they had no money for food or clothing, since the father didn't work" (p.18).

Many abducted children are unable to form friendships. For children, the experience of abduction entrenches their developmental growth. Dr. Minkoff noted that *"I have never seen a stolid child who had a good friend. When normal kids get to be around eight to twelve years old, a friend becomes everything to them. They can share special things they can't even talk to their parents about"* (In: Khaki, 1994: p.17).

Child psychiatrists and psychologists argue that forming friendships and a support group outside the family is a vital part of the developmental stages in childhood from

ages five to twelve (Grusec and Lytton, 1988). In many ways, friendships facilitate a child's own self worth. The same researchers argue that "*the family, the world of friends and of school, and their interconnections are all environmental influences that shape the child's development*" (p.216). This provides support that, in addition to other emotional consequences, parental abduction poses a threat to a child's developmental growth.

The experiences of abducted children range from relatively minor ones to major traumas. On one end of the spectrum, children remain in one location, and are well cared for by the abductor. In other cases children are forced to live in dismal circumstances. Abrahms (1983) provided the following examples to support this argument.

In Britain one mother kept his six year old son in a secret safe-house. He had been locked inside an apartment for five years. The boy had never been to school, nor did he know what a playground was until his father introduced him to the outdoors. In another case a boy was found with his father in the hills of California in a tent, which they only left occasionally for food. A nine month old baby was locked in a car by himself, for four months the infant and his father had been living off garbage behind the supermarket (p.26). While these experiences may sound extreme, they do occur and highlight the potential detrimental circumstances of abduction.

To explain the sudden change in lifestyle, some abductors tell the child that the other parent is dead or does not want to see them anymore (Doek, 1996; Sagatun and Barrett, 1990). Children may be forced to live their lives on the run from authorities. Some children are forced to lie, not allowed to discuss their past, not form any permanent ties, or friendships. Abrahms (1983) provides examples of these circumstances.

“Steve, a devout Catholic, brought up never to lie, was ordered by his father to tell teachers and playmates that his mother had been killed in a car crash....Another child was instructed by his snatcher to say he was living with his father, when ‘home’ was actually elsewhere” (p.24).

Further supporting this position, Schetky and Haller (1983) noted that

“the children may be told by the abductor to lie about such things as their names and previous addresses when they enroll in a new school...it is not infrequent that when children are allowed to leave their new home that they will be accompanied by someone under all circumstances” (p.279).

Children may experience feelings of anger, depression and even betrayal of the other parent for not coming for them (Abrahms, 1983; Schetky and Haller, 1983). The longer the children are missing, the more likely they are to form a bond with the abductor. Once found, they may not want to return to the searching parent. If they were very young at the time of the abduction, they may not remember the searching parent. As previously mentioned, the abductor may have told the child that the searching parent is dead. The reappearance of the searching parent may cause a variety of conflicting emotions for the child. Abrahms (1983) noted one case in which a father told his daughters that their mother was dead. *“The combination of a coterie of uniformed police and the reappearance of her dead mother haunted the four year old long after the reunion”* (p.21).

Many children who have been abducted do not forget their experiences of ‘life on the run’. During an interview with his mother, a three year old recovered child explained that *“while he was on the run, he went on lots of planes and his daddy always carried a little bag with his three bottles in it”* (Interview: Dec. 3.97). This boy was abducted by his father and traveled through five countries to avoid officials and the searching parent. Contrary to what many believe, research supports the argument that many children, as

young as two years old, show behavioural changes indicative of an emotionally disturbing experience (Abrahms, 1983; Schetky and Haller, 1983; Senior et al., 1982).

The emotional impact of abduction may leave children feeling confused, hurt, and angry. In addition to the emotional trauma of being taken away from the other parent, family members and friends, many children suffer neglect and physical abuse. When and if a child is recovered, they are left scarred from the experience (Senior et al., 1982; Schetky and Haller, 1983; Tedisco and Paludi, 1996).

Salasin (1981) argued that the long term effects of abduction may not manifest themselves for a period of time. Unlike physical abuse and neglect of children, where evidence may be apparent, psychological problems are subtle and may not surface for some years. In accordance with Salasin, Tedisco and Paludi (1996) concluded that *"a victim's faith in their own judgement about other people can be shattered, and often survivors report that 'they don't know who to trust anymore'. They question what is normal and who can be trusted long into their adult years"* (p.6).

Child experts debate the extent to which recovered youngsters are emotionally distressed, but the degree is pendent upon several factors: the length of time the child is missing, the child's age and temperament, the child's treatment by the abductor, the child's experiences on the run, and once recovered, the kind of support the child receives in the community (Agopian, 1980; Greif and Hegar, 1993).

The long-term effects of abduction requires more research. Specialists in the field are beginning to note correlations between being snatched and later antisocial behaviour, such as delinquency, prostitution, and drug addiction (Schetky and Haller, 1983). More 'acceptable' problems such as mistrust, low self-esteem and chronic depression are also

being linked. One researcher noted that “*while stress symptoms may have long since vanished, underlying scars from the ordeal may linger indefinitely*” (Solnit and Goldstein. 1994: p.76).

The studies examined provide support that parental abduction elicits some emotional distress for children. Tedisco and Paludi (1996) concluded that “*abducted and abused children are at a nearly fourfold increased lifetime risk for any psychiatric disorder and at a threefold risk for substance abuse*” (p.3). To assume that if a child is with a parent they are not in danger is a myth. For example, one father cornered by police, pulled a knife on his six-year old daughter and threatened to cut her up, than kill himself (Abrahms, 1983: p.148).

It should not take a specific number of cases, or several cases with a horrific outcome to situate parental abduction both as a social problem. Abrahms concluded that “*being abducted can be more frightening and more isolating than death. The child has no one with whom to share his or her grief*” (p.21).

There is a need to examine the impact of abduction in future research. Understanding the impact of abduction is paramount in helping recovered children and family members try and mend the broken relationship, as well as to minimize any emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse or neglect that may have occurred during the time the children were missing. Some children and families require assistance from professionals to learn to cope with, or minimize, the after effects of abduction. As such, it is society’s responsibility to have not only an understanding of the problem, but also the services available to help abducted children and their families.

Re-Abduction

Re-abduction can occur when a searching parent abducts to get the child back, or after being recovered, the abductor attempts to take the children again. Recovered children may live in fear of a recurring abduction. Abrahms (1983) concluded that:

“Like fugitives from justice, returned children rarely relax. They are nervous, and suspicious, convinced that the abducting parents are pursuing them...Furthermore, kids just back from a whirlwind tour of raunchy restaurants and fleabag hotels find themselves on the move once more” (p.67).

This type of lifestyle is not conducive to providing children with the necessities for optimal emotional and developmental growth.

Parents of recovered children also live in constant fear that their children will be re-abducted. To minimize this fear some searching parents go into hiding after recovering their children. The children then suffer the additional emotional consequence of living life in hiding again, only this time it is with the searching parent.

In cases of international abduction, the consequences of re-abduction could further endanger the child, as well as the searching parent. The searching parent could face possible arrest and imprisonment in that country. In consequence, the children could then be taken away and put into foster care until a resolution is found. Such was the cases with some of the children in Sagatun and Barrett’s study (1990), *“In some cases children recovered from other countries were forced to spend months in foster care away from both parents”* (p.441). These circumstances present additional stress to an already emotionally stressful situation.

Recovered Children

“Being stolen is frightening, so is being recovered” (Abrahms, 1983: p.49).

Upon their recovery, children who have been abducted face many obstacles. They may not recognize the searching parent. Not truly understanding what has happened they may be angry with the searching parent and be confused with his or her sudden reappearance. Children that have been told that the searching parent is dead or will harm them often faint, or are consumed with fear (Abrahms, 1983). If the searching parent has remarried while the child was missing, the child may feel like a stranger in the family.

Abrahms (1983) noted that

“not all kids leap into their absent parent’s arms. Brought up believing that the searching parent is dead or abandoned them, they are confused...parents may expect paradise, but often they find the aftermath of the recovery is hell” (p.50).

Searching parents are unprepared and devastated by this response. They think that the missing child will respond in the same way as they do.

Greif and Hegar (1993) stress the importance of giving the child time to re-adjust.

“Children who are missing need to be given time to adjust without feeling that their adaptation has to occur on a pre-set schedule” (p.274). In accordance Schetky and Haller (1983) concluded that *“children may have no memory of the original custodial parent and may totally reject contact with the parent who spent years searching for them” (p.280).*

Children also face problems with reintegration into their previous lifestyle. If neglected while missing, they may be emotionally and academically behind their peers. These problems are further perpetuated when children are taken to a country where the language or cultural influences were dramatically different. These children face harder obstacles upon their return.

Understanding the dynamics of the recovery of abducted children is one of the most significant ways in which intervention measures can be introduced to facilitate the recovery process, for the abducted child, and the family have to deal with the effects of the abduction long after they are reunited. This study has been designed to provide a foundation for the implementation of policies to help with the reunification of recovered children and searching parents.

iii) Parental Abduction As A Social Problem

Parental abduction is a problem that reaches beyond the scope of a domestic or family dispute. It is a complex issue, that is, in some cases, a result of societal changes such as increased divorce, custodial trends, or as a result of opposing cultural beliefs. The literature reviewed in this study highlights the range of disciplinary boundaries that parental abduction crosses.

When a child is abducted by a parent, the searching parent seeks the assistance of law enforcement agencies, lawyers, missing children organizations, and in some cases, government agencies. The lack of a focused immediate response from these agencies puts abducted children at further risk. This may be due to a lack of knowledge about the impact of parental abduction on children and their families. Finkelhor and his colleagues (1995) noted that “*police tend to view parental abduction as essentially civil cases that do not require their intervention...Police officers also seem to lack extensive training in the dynamics of family abductions*” (p.207). Teachers, psychiatrists, psychologists, and the family court system are involved when the child is recovered. These agents should however, also be made aware of the possible warning signs of parental abduction so such events may be thwarted.

It is impossible to claim that parental abduction is merely a family problem, the social aspects of parental abduction cannot be ignored. Researchers have been trying to situate parental abduction as part of a social context for sometime. For example, Sagatun and Barrett (1990) concluded that *“it is clear that child abduction has a devastating impact on the family system, particularly on the abducted child. It is costly to society as well”* (p.442). Furthermore, Greif and Hegar (1991) argue that *“child snatching by a parent is a significant social problem that threatens the stability of many families experiencing a marital breakup”* (p.215). Findings from the literature reviewed, and from this study support the hypothesis that there is an interconnection between the private and public spheres of family and community life.

Until parental abduction is contextualized as a social problem, it will not receive the consideration, or awareness, that it deserves. The welfare of children should be enough to situate parental abduction as a larger social issue. However, there is evidence to support that, in case law, and a general feeling among lawyers, law enforcement agencies, and society as a whole, parental abduction is regarded as a part of marital and custody disputes (Sagatun and Barrett, 1990). In consequence, parental abduction is still not considered a social problem. In contrast, this study has described the juxtaposition that exists between the two social institutions thereby outlining an area upon which future research and social policy analysis may focus.

iv) Parental Abduction As A Form Of Child Abuse

Many researchers in the field of parental abduction argue that it is a form of child abuse (Abrahms, 1983; Huntington, 1986; Schetky and Haller, 1983; Senior et. al. 1982). According to Payne and Payne (1993), in Canada child abuse may involve physical,

sexual or emotional oppression of a child (p.58). Research indicates that parental abduction is abuse of a child. Research supports that parentally abducted children are subjected to emotional distress (Doek, 1996; Khaki, 1994; Schetky and Haller, 1983). From a legal perspective emotional abuse “*refers to conduct that produces psychological harm to the child. Emotional abuse undermines a child's sense of well-being and impairs the child's development and ability to reach his or her full potential. It often produces life-long difficulties for the emotionally abused victim*” (p.58).

In the questionnaire respondents were asked if they felt that parental abduction should be considered a form of child abuse. These individuals have been through the experience, and have a better understanding of parental abduction. Most parents responded that parental abduction should be considered a form of child abuse. They provided a variety of reasons to support their opinions.

A majority responded that “*because the children need both parents' love and affection and you can't simply tell the child to forget about the other parent*”, or that “*in these circumstances, children are held hostage, if it were an adult it would be taken as a serious offence.*” Several indicated that “*under no circumstances should a child be manipulated, and lied to, and brainwashed especially because of the abductor's selfish reasons.*” Another respondent stated that “*when there is both mental and physical pain is being inflicted what else can you call it.*”

In Canada, statutes have been implemented to protect children from abuse. Provinces such as Alberta, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Ontario and Quebec have relatively detailed declarations that stress “*the importance of continuity and stability for children*” (Payne and Payne, 1993: p.61). However, definitions of ‘protection’ are vague.

In these statutes, a child in need of protection is “*a child without adequate care, supervision or control...a child living in unfit and improper circumstances*” (p.62). The present study, as well as previous studies examined, provide support to show that when children are abducted, they are often exposed to unfit living arrangements, and living in improper circumstances. Thus, society has the responsibility not only to implement such statutes, but also to enforce them.

Similar to other forms of child abuse, parental abduction may be viewed as an abuse of power, trust and love. Regardless of the abductor’s motive, children should not be brought into the battle of unresolved conflict between parents. Furthermore, when parents deprive children of the opportunity of maintaining a relationship with the other parent, and family members left behind, it should be viewed as a social problem.

v) Parental Abduction and the Law

Parental abduction is a criminal offence under sections 282-286 of the Canadian Criminal Code. In this context, parental abduction is defined as:

“Everyone who, being a parent, guardian or person having the lawful care of a person under the age of sixteen years, takes, entices away, conceals, detains, receives or harbours that person with the intent to deprive a parent or guardian, or any other person who has the lawful care or charge of that person, of the possession of that person” (Canadian Criminal Code. p.508).

Although the common perception is that most cases of parental abduction occur during or after a divorce, a large number occur before the family relationship dissolves. In Canada, if there is no legal custody order, both parents are considered to have equal legal custody of the child. Whether or not there was a legal custody order in place, parental abduction is still considered an offence under the criminal code subsections 282 pertains to abductions that occur after a custody order is in place, and 283 for cases in

which there is no custodial order. Both offences can be considered as a summary offence, or as an indictable offence with a maximum ten year prison sentence.

Yet, whether abduction stems from the dissolution of a common-law or marital union, few abductions are penalized for their acts. This is because law enforcement agencies are more likely to consider and treat parental abduction as a 'domestic problem' rather than a criminal offence. According to Finkelhor and his colleagues (1995), police are likely to treat family abductions like other types of family disputes. *"It is widely believed that the police do not treat family crimes as seriously as they do similar offences involving non-family abductions"* (p.207). Rarely are there any criminal charges laid against the abductor. As such, the consequences, if any, for the abductor are minimal.

A majority of the respondents who replied to the survey, as well as those interviewed, suggest that the justice system ignores the problem of parental abduction. As previously stated, even though there are legal statutes in place to address the issue of parental abduction, it does not appear that they are not enforced (Finkelhor et.al.1995: Greif and Hegar, 1994). The research literature reviewed, and findings from this study suggest that this lack of enforcement stems from our vision of the family as a nurturing unit of safe refuge in which children are protected from harm.

In a report of custody and access, Payne and Payne (1993) caution that

"No matter how earnest and well-meant the motivation, a parent who kidnaps a child will rarely receive judicial sympathy..Also, a parent who deprives another of lawful custody can be charged with the very serious criminal offence of abduction" (p.40).

The operative word in that quote is 'can', research indicates that rarely are these

charges pursued. In this manner, the legal system perpetuates the problem of parental abduction. By not taking strong and immediate action against abductors, it encourages rather than discourages this type of behaviour. This observation supports Abrahms' (1983) conclusions that, "*abducting parents who break the law are rarely caught or punished, while mothers or fathers who play by the book frequently lose out*" (p.88). The role of the legal system is to deter parental abductions before they occur, and take some sort of action to punish the abductor when the child is recovered.

As previously stated, many parents who have been through the experience of abduction have no faith in the system. One searching parent shared his frustrations.

"I had a lot of faith in the legal system when my ex-wife stole my kids. What woke me up was when the judge said 'I understand your situation, but you must understand that the courts can only render a custody order, but they cannot enforce it when your ex-wife's whereabouts are unknown'." (Interview: Jan/98).

One possible reason that the justice system is hesitant to pursue criminal sanction for parental abduction may be embedded in the premise that convicting a parent would be a detrimental act that may cause further damage to the child. For example, if a child has been living with the abductor for an extended period of time, they should not be forced to sever the emotional ties with the abductor. This is consistent with Greif and Hegar (1993) who argue that "*the child cannot be put in the position of having to defend or renounce the relationship with the abductor*" (p.274).

Whether or not the proper way to deal with abduction is by imprisonment, more precise steps need to be taken to discourage parental abduction as an option when dealing with conflict between the parents. At minimum, abductors should be prosecuted and dealt with for taking the law into their own hands.

Conclusion

“One of the most severe long-term effects of being abducted is growing up with a distorted notion of love. Children assume that love gives people license to behave any way they want, including illegally and immorally” (Abrahms, 1983: p.78).

This study has provided evidence to show the complexity of parental abduction.

Data from this study reflects a high proportion of international parental abduction. Thus, a limitation of this study is the lack of representation of domestic parental abduction cases. Future research would establish whether this is a result of the data collection methods, or is reflective of parental abduction cases in Canada. Further research would also facilitate a better understanding of the nature of parental abduction in Canada.

For example, patterns from this study show that there is a relationship between the gender of the abductor and custodial trends. The majority of abductors were male, and a majority of mothers were the custodial parent. As such, is it judicial decisions that motivate parents to abduct their children? In addition, further research would establish if the pattern of parents born outside Canada taking the children back to their native country is typical.

The nature of parental abduction is deeply embedded in conflict. The source of the conflict is likely to be rooted in different cultural, religious, child-rearing practices or marital conflict. Additionally, the nature of parental abduction is also rooted in the legal system, where slow divorce and custody processes perpetuate conflict. Implementing ways to address the nature of conflict should deter parents from abducting their children as a way of dealing with the conflict.

Evidence has been presented to show at minimal, the emotional trauma for the abducted child. Searching parents and other family members are also traumatized. They

live in constant fear and desperation, not knowing whether their child is alive, whether they are being properly cared for, and most of all, whether they will ever see their child again. To sustain the myth that a child is okay if they are with a parent underestimates the severity of this problem.

Society is affected by parental abduction in a variety of ways. Abduction is a violation of the law. Furthermore, children who are abducted learn that it is okay to break the law. Further research is needed to support the position that abducted children may grow up with only minimal respect for the justice system (Tedisco and Paludi, 1996). Evidence has been presented to show that recovered children display signs of increased fear and anxiety, withdrawal, and increased aggression (Abrahms, 1983; Schetky and Haller, 1983; Senior et.al. 1982). Research indicates that children who show increased signs of anger and aggression are more likely to become juvenile delinquents (Schetky and Haller, 1983). The most detrimental consequence of parental abduction is the death of a child. *"God forgive me for what I am about to do, implored a sick father in a note he wrote before murdering his daughter"* (Abrahms, 1983: p.19).

Child abduction is a crime. Punishment should hold true, whether the abductor is a stranger or a parent. It must be recognized by society that parental abduction is a result of conflict that has the potential to be destructive in a variety of ways. If we continue to believe that children are safe because they are with a parent, we are supporting a social environment in which these actions may prevail. Supporting this argument, Senior et al. (1982) concluded that *"It seems that as long as the laws remain soft and ineffectively enforced, and as long as parents continue to use children as vehicles to vent their hostile feelings, child snatching will remain a problem"* (p.582). If parental abduction continues

to be viewed in the context of a domestic dispute, these 'domestic disputes' have the potential of becoming the standard alternative for parents who have unresolved conflict. As such, many more children and their families will experience the effects described in this study.

Evidence has been presented here to support the argument that parental abduction evokes emotional distress on children. Increased awareness about the possibility and consequences of parental abduction is necessary; specifically those who work in the area of child welfare and family law. Law enforcement agencies, as well as those who come into contact with family members experiencing conflict should therefore be made aware of the complexity and potential severity of parental abduction.

Parental abduction is a major concern, and further complications arise when a child is taken out of the country. Greif and Hegar (1993) argue that "*When abductions involve the crossing of international borders, unweaving the fabric of the events is even more cumbersome*" (p.270). Society needs to be aware of the prevalence, and potential consequences of parental abduction, as well as the additional strain that occurs when abducted children are taken out of the country. In these circumstances, a network of co-operating agencies would be beneficial in the deterrence of abduction as well as the recovery of internationally abducted children.

Recommendations

When a child is abducted, the first priority should be to find the missing child. This should remain a priority regardless of the relationship between the child and the abductor. Both law enforcement agencies and the justice system need to recognize that

many cases of parental abduction occur prior to a custodial order being awarded. As such, existing policies should be remedied to treat these abductions with the same severity, and to deal with the cases as expeditiously as cases in which there is an existing custody order. Furthermore, proving that the abductor took the child with the 'intent' to deprive the searching parent from seeing the child should be a secondary concern to recovering the abducted child.

Divorce should not be viewed as a process of conciliation rather than as an adversary process. This may help minimize the hostility. Second, once divorce is inevitable, legal custody decisions should be made as soon as possible. In order to minimize conflict, post divorce custody mediation and counselling should be made available. Family and social policies should reflect an awareness of, and address the needs of the cultural diversity that exists in Canadian families.

From a legal perspective, parental abduction is a serious offence. It should also be considered as and treated as criminal offence. While a jail term may not be the most appropriate punishment, implementing some sort of consequence for this action may serve as a deterrent for future abductions. Policies should be made to make parental abduction an extraditable offence. Further research is required to establish realistic deterrents, and once established these deterrents need to be implemented and enforced.

Once a child has been taken out of the country, recovery becomes more complex. In this study, a large proportion of abductors were born outside Canada, and have dual citizenship. It may be time to revisit the admissibility of dual citizenship, which permits individuals to travel under a passport from another country. Dual citizenship hinders the prevention of international abduction, and creates serious problems for the recovery of

children. Parents can request a foreign embassy or consulate not to process a passport application for their child. They can also request the embassy or consulate not to issue a visa for that country. However, there is no legal obligation for countries to comply with these requests.

One major deterrent would be to implement a passport screening process. This idea was proposed at the Hague Convention where it was argued that *“In connection with the issuance and use of passports, the Central Authorities could serve as a centralized data center to provide on request information on outstanding custody orders, pending divorce or custody suits, visitation rights etc.”* (Passanante. 1996: p.701)

Parents can request to have their child’s name entered in the Passport Office Control List system. This enables the Passport Office to notify the parent or his/her attorney if an application for a Canadian passport for the child is received anywhere in Canada, or at any consulate or Canadian embassy abroad (Department of Foreign Affairs, 1996: p.7). Parents should take all possible measures to ensure the safety of their children.

vi) Future Research

In this study findings indicate that a majority of abducting parents are male, over the age of thirty-seven, and born outside Canada. A majority of abducted children were also male, between two and six, and were taken out of Canada. In contrast to some of the literature reviewed, findings from this study indicate that fathers are more likely to abduct after a custody decision has been made, and mothers before. Findings from this study indicate that in a majority of cases, the gender of the abductor and abducted child were the same. Future studies would establish whether this is a pattern or a coincidence in this

sample. Additionally, there was an equal proportion of single and multiple abductions. Findings from this study indicate that the average duration of an abduction was approximately two years. Although some of these findings are somewhat consistent with other studies reviewed in the United States, there are also differences that cannot be ignored. As such, these findings provide support that there is a need for more research on parental abduction in Canada.

Because there are only a few Canadian studies on parental abduction, there are endless possibilities for future research. First and foremost, increased awareness about the complexity and a deeper understanding of the impact of parental abduction is needed. As such, future research using larger sample sizes would provide a deeper understanding of the nature and patterns of parental abduction in Canada. Research on the prevalence and patterns of domestic abduction is also needed. Future research should attempt to reach this population through mediums other than police records and/or missing children's organizations. In this way, a different perspective may be attained.

Because the majority of existing policies focus on cases in which a custody order is already in effect, future studies should establish the prevalence of parental abduction cases that occur prior to a custody decision being made. Research indicates that a large proportion of parental abduction cases occur before a custody decision is made. This indicates that there is a gap in current policies. Future research would provide support to this premise.

Research on the circumstances that precipitate abduction would facilitate the development of suitable prevention measures to minimize the occurrence of parental abduction in Canada. For example, the relationship between parental abduction and

family violence should be addressed. Additionally, research is required to determine the role of the court system, and slow court processes, as potential sources of motivations for abduction. Longitudinal studies on the effects of abduction would facilitate a better understanding of the impact of parental abduction.

If possible, attempts should be made to include the experiences of children (from their perspective), as well as more interviews with abductors. Sociological investigation encourages and emphasizes the importance of multiple interpretation. In order to fully understand parental abduction, the voices of abducted children, abductors, and searching parents must be captured. Gaining an objective understanding of the abductor's perspective would facilitate the development of prevention measures. In addition, learning about the experiences of abducted children would allow for the implementation of steps to better deal with or minimize the after effects of the abduction. Learning more about the impact of abduction may also encourage those in society to regard parental abduction as a social problem that has potential harmful effects for children.

PREVENTION

There are some preventive measures that parents who are concerned about abduction can take. All parents, especially those who have separated from their partner, should take extra precautions to ensure the following:

1. Talk openly with children. The parent should make sure the child knows that they would never give them up, and if they were ever missing they would never stop searching for them.
2. Make sure that your child has his/her own passport and notify the Passport Office that they are not to be taken out of the country without your permission.
3. Teach your child to use the telephone, including how to make long distance calls.
4. Make sure schools, day-care facilities and baby-sitters know who is allowed to pick up the children. Make up a password that only the parent and the child knows, if the parent sends anyone else to pick up the child, they must have that password. If anyone attempts to pick them up who doesn't know this password tell the child to report to school authorities, or someone else the child trusts.
5. In a safe, but easily accessible place, keep current photographs and information including nicknames, identifying marks, height, weight etc., of your children as well as the other parent. It is also important to know the addresses and contacts of the other parent.
6. A well written custody order is paramount in preventing parental abductions. Custody experts suggest that a custody order should include: prohibition of travel without the permission of both the parents. If one parent does not have Canadian citizenship, then a bond should be posted in the event of travel to another country and that bond would be forfeited in the event of an abduction or wrongful retention.

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Appendix A: Survey Package

- i) Letter from Researcher to Searching Parent
- ii) Letter from Thesis Supervisor
- iii) Survey to Parents Who Have Recovered Their Children
- iv) Survey to Parents Whose Children Are Still Missing

Jessie-Lynn MacDonald
419-316 Lorry Greenberg Dr.
Ottawa, ON
KIT 2P4

October 24, 1997

Dear Parent

My name is Jessie-Lynn MacDonald, I currently working on my Master's degree in sociology at Carleton University, Ottawa, Ontario. Over the past two years I have been doing research in the area of parental abduction. I was both surprised and saddened to discover how many cases of parental abduction there are in Canada. There is also a large number of cases not reported to police, and therefore, not included in statistics. Very little is known about the depth and severity of this problem in Canada. Most of the literature on parental abduction refers to statistics and information gathered in the United States.

I feel that more efforts should be made to understand and address the problem of parental abduction, which is why I have chosen to do further research in this area. In an attempt to better understand the problem myself, I have spent the past two years reading about parental abduction in Canada, as well as elsewhere. To help families with missing children I volunteer for Child Find.

Families that have been through, or are currently going through this experience know how drastically it changes the lives of everyone involved, this needs to be recognized by others. I cannot begin to understand what you have been through, but I am asking you to help me to try and understand. It is only through your knowledge and experience that we can find ways prevent this from happening to other parents and children.

The main goal of my research is to gain a better understanding about how, and in what way, abduction has affected your family life. A secondary goal is to increase public awareness about the severity and complexity of parental abduction. To accomplish these goals I need your help. You know so much more about parental abduction I do. With your help we can bring learn more about this problem, and hopefully do something to change the way parental abduction is viewed, and dealt with by society.

I have put together some questions in the form of a survey. It should take approximately 30 to 45 minutes to fill out. This survey has been mailed to you confidentially through missing children's organizations. Your name has not been given to me. If you receive more than one survey I apologize, it is likely because you were in touch with more than one missing children's organization. Please forward the second survey back to me. The information gathered from the survey is anonymous and confidential. I do not ask for your name or location. The data will be used to gain a better understanding of all parental abduction cases in Canada. There will be no way for anyone to recognize individual cases. The more parents that respond, the more powerful

the survey will be. We may be able to find patterns or trends that could help prevent future cases of parental abduction. I have already been contacted by government institutions, and members of the legal community voicing an interest in the results of this survey.

You will find enclosed in this package a letter from my thesis supervisor, the survey, and a return envelope, already stamped and addressed. I understand that I am asking you to discuss a sensitive and emotional experience. I have also enclosed a list of contact numbers should you feel the need to further discuss the emotional issues raised from this survey. The back of the survey pages are blank for you to include additional information or comments. If you have any questions or would like to further discuss any of the issues brought up here, please do not hesitate to contact me in any of the following ways.

Phone: (613) 738-5363 - you can call collect.

E-mail: jlmacdon@chat.carleton.ca

Please answer the questions to the best of your ability. If the answers provided do not fit your case, put the question number with your own answer on the back page. If you do not feel comfortable answering a question, just leave it blank. I remind you again that all answers are confidential, and anonymous.

I sincerely hope that you will take the time to fill out this survey and **return it as soon as possible**. Each parental abduction case is unique, and deserves attention. Please let your voice be heard, it may help prevent other children, and parents, from going through a similar experience. I strongly believe that by working together, we can make a difference.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jessie-Lynn MacDonald".

Jessie-Lynn MacDonald

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
8742 Loeb Building
1125 Colonel By Drive
Ottawa, ON K1S 5B6 Canada
Tel: 613 520 2582
Fax: 613 520 4060

October 23, 1997

You are being asked to participate in a survey that may assist many people. Ms. Jessie Lynn MacDonald is a graduate student at Carleton University. She has contributed her time as a volunteer to Child Find, and time and money in preparing, distributing, and eventually analyzing this questionnaire. In doing so she has my support and that of colleagues.

All information provided in the questionnaire will be kept absolutely CONFIDENTIAL. No person will be identified.

The information collected will be merged and presented only in general statistical form in an M.A. thesis and a final report. Findings will be used to better understand, and better prevent, child abduction. A final report will be shared with any interested individual or agency.

For the information to be useful, however, we require your time and participation in completing the survey questionnaire. The higher the participation rate in the survey, the higher the reliability and usefulness of the survey findings.

Please, therefore, take a few minutes to carefully complete the survey questionnaire, and then to return it as soon as possible in the enclosed self-addressed and postage-paid envelope.

Thank you for your help.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dennis P. Force".

Dennis P. Force, Ph.D.
Professor

PARENTAL ABDUCTION

A SILENT PROBLEM IN CANADIAN SOCIETY

The Searching Parent's Perspective

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE SEARCHING PARENT

1. What gender are you?

Male ☐ Female ☐

2. At the time of the abduction, how old were you?

☐ under 18
☐ 18-24
☐ 25-31
☐ 32-36
☐ 36-41
☐ 41-50
☐ over 50

3. What is your religious affiliation?

☐ Protestant ☐ Roman Catholic
☐ Jewish ☐ Hindu
☐ Muslim (Islam) ☐ Other (specify) _____

4. In what country were you born?

5. If born outside Canada, when did you immigrate to Canada?

Year _____

6. What is your citizenship?

☐ Canada, citizen by birth
☐ Canada, citizen by naturalization
☐ Same country as birth
☐ Other (Please Specify) _____

7. At the time of the abduction what was your educational background?

☐ primary school (1-8 yrs)
☐ some high-school (9-11 yrs)
☐ completed high-school (12 + yrs)
☐ some college/university
☐ completed college/university (diploma/degree)
☐ some post-graduate school
☐ post-graduate (degree)
☐ other (specify) _____

8. At the time of the abduction were you employed?

☐ yes
☐ no - skip to question 10

9. If you were working, what kind of work were you doing?

10. At the time of the abduction what was your personal income level?

☐ less than 15,000
☐ 15,000 to 19,999
☐ 20,000 to 24,999
☐ 25,000 to 30,999
☐ 31,000 to 40,999
☐ 41,000 to 50,999
☐ 51,000 to 60,000
☐ over 60,000

11. Please answer the following chart for each child based on information at the time of the abduction.

Child	Gender M/F	Year Born	What Country S/he Born	Legal Citizenship	Was Child Abducted Y/N
First					
Second					
Third					
Fourth					
Fifth					
Sixth					
Seventh					
Eighth					
Ninth					
Tenth					

(If you have more than ten children please check the box and fill out the same information on the back of this page.)

BACKGROUND OF ABDUCTING PARENT

The purpose of this section is to determine whether or not it is possible to formulate a profile of the abducting parent. Please fill out the answers to the best of your knowledge.

12. Is the abductor the biological parent of the child[ren]?

☐ yes

☐ no, but has legally adopted the children

☐ no

☐ other(specify)

13. Is the abductor?

Male ☐ Female ☐

14. How old was the abductor when s/he took your child[ren]?

☐ under 18

☐ 18-24

☐ 25-31

☐ 32-36

☐ 36-41

☐ 41-50

☐ over 50

15. What is his/her religious affiliation?

☐ Protestant

☐ Roman Catholic

☐ Jewish

☐ Hindu

☐ Muslim (Islam)

☐ Other (specify)

16. In what country was s/he born?

17. If born outside Canada, when did s/he immigrate to Canada?

Year

18. What is his/her citizenship?

☐ Canada, citizen by birth

☐ Canada, citizen by naturalization

☐ Same country as birth

☐ Other (Please Specify)

19. At the time of the abduction what was his/her educational background?

- ☐ primary school (1-8 yrs)
- ☐ some high-school (9-11 yrs)
- ☐ completed high-school (12 + yrs)
- ☐ some college/university
- ☐ completed college/university (diploma/degree)
- ☐ some post-graduate school
- ☐ post-graduate (degree)
- ☐ other (specify) _____

20. At the time of the abduction was s/he employed?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no -- skip to question # 22

21. If s/he was employed, what type of work was s/he doing?

22. At the time of the abduction what was his/her approximate income level?

- ☐ less than 15,000
- ☐ 15,000 to 19,999
- ☐ 20,000 to 24,999
- ☐ 25,000 to 30,999
- ☐ 31,000 to 40,999
- ☐ 41,000 to 50,999
- ☐ 51,000 to 60,000
- ☐ over 60,000
- ☐ don't know

23. Did the abductor have a criminal record before s/he took your child[ren]?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know

PRIOR TO THE ABDUCTION

24. Prior to the abduction, were you living with the abductor?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

25. What was your legal marital status at the time of the abduction?

- ☐ married
- ☐ common-law
- ☐ separated
- ☐ divorced
- ☐ widowed
- ☐ single never married

26. During your relationship with the abducting parent, did s/he have problems with any of the following?

- alcohol ☐ yes ☐ no
 - drugs ☐ yes ☐ no
 - physically abusive towards you ☐ yes ☐ no
 - mentally abusive towards you ☐ yes ☐ no
 - sexually abusive towards you ☐ yes ☐ no
 - other (specify) _____
- (Use the back of page if necessary.)

27. How did this affect your relationship?

(Please use back of page if necessary.)

- ☐ not applicable to my relationship

28. During your relationship with the other parent, did you have problems with any of the following?

- alcohol ☐ yes ☐ no
- drugs ☐ yes ☐ no
- physically abusive toward other parent ☐ yes ☐ no
- mentally abusive toward other parent ☐ yes ☐ no
- sexually abusive towards other parent ☐ yes ☐ no
- other (specify) _____

29. How did this affect your relationship?

(Please use back of page if necessary.)

- ☐ not applicable to my relationship

30. Was the abductor ever abusive towards the child[ren]? Please provide brief explanation. Use back of the page if necessary.

QUESTIONS 31 TO 33 ARE TO BE FILLED OUT BY PARENTS WHO WERE SEPARATED FROM THE ABDUCTOR AT THE TIME OF THE ABDUCTION. IF YOU WERE STILL WITH THE ABDUCTING PARENT PLEASE GO TO QUESTION # 34

31. Was there a legal custody order in place at the time of the abduction?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no, but there was one pending
- ☐ no -- skip to question # 33.
- ☐ don't know -- skip to question # 33

32. At the time of the abduction what type of custody was ordered by the courts?

- ☐ sole custody to the mother
- ☐ sole custody to the father
- ☐ joint physical custody (an equal amount of time with each parent)
- ☐ joint custody
- ☐ primary custody to the mother
- ☐ primary custody to the father
- ☐ don't know

33. Prior to the abduction, what type of contact did the child[ren] have with the abductor?

- ☐ regular visitation
- ☐ irregular visitation
- ☐ only on holidays
- ☐ letter or telephone contact
- ☐ no contact
- ☐ other (specify) _____

34. Was there anything suspicious about the abductor's behaviour before s/he took the child[ren]?

- ☐ yes, (please explain)

(Use back of page if necessary.)

- ☐ no

35. Had s/he ever threatened or talked about abduction before?

- ☐ yes, when we were married
- ☐ yes, after we separated
- ☐ no

36. Did you ever talk about taking your child[ren] from the other parent?

- ☐ yes, when we were married
- ☐ yes, after we separated
- ☐ no

THE ABDUCTION AND EVENTS SURROUNDING IT.

The purpose of this section is to better understand what happened around the time of the abduction.

37. At the time of the abduction where were you living?

- ☐ British Columbia
- ☐ Alberta
- ☐ Saskatchewan
- ☐ Manitoba
- ☐ Ontario
- ☐ Québec
- ☐ New Brunswick
- ☐ Prince Edward Island
- ☐ Nova Scotia
- ☐ Newfoundland
- ☐ North West Territories
- ☐ Yukon
- ☐ other (specify) _____

38. Please indicate when your child went missing.

Day of Week Month Year

39. What time of day was[were] your child[ren] taken?

- ☐ morning
- ☐ afternoon
- ☐ evening
- ☐ during the night
- ☐ don't know

40. Where was[were] your child[ren] taken from?

- ☐ your home
- ☐ abductor's home
- ☐ school/daycare
- ☐ playground
- ☐ child's friend's house
- ☐ other (specify) _____
- ☐ don't know

41. How did you first learn that your child[ren] was[were] abducted?

- ☐ other parent failed to return child[ren] from scheduled visit
- ☐ notified by school that child[ren] was missing
- ☐ notified by abductor's friend/relative
- ☐ notified by abductor
- ☐ other (specify) _____

42. Please indicate who you contacted when you learned that your child[ren] was[were] abducted, and in what order you contacted them.

- ☐ police
- ☐ friends
- ☐ family
- ☐ other parent's family
- ☐ lawyer
- ☐ other (specify) _____

MOTIVATION FOR THE ABDUCTION

43. Do you think the abductor realized what s/he was doing when s/he took your child[ren]?

- ☐ yes, I think s/he planned this
- ☐ yes, but I think it was spontaneous
- ☐ not sure
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know

44. Why do you think the abductor did this? Please check all that apply.

- ☐ to hurt or seek revenge against you
- ☐ pressure from others (ie. family/friends)
- ☐ dissatisfaction with custody decision
- ☐ unhappy about your new marriage or relationship
- ☐ abductor's new marriage/relationship
- ☐ unresponsiveness of courts
- ☐ concerns or allegations of abuse
- ☐ different child rearing practices
- ☐ other (specify) _____

☐ don't know

45. Did s/he give any reason for her/his actions? Please check all that apply.

- ☐ to hurt or seek revenge against you
- ☐ pressure from others (ie. family/friends)
- ☐ dissatisfaction with custody decision
- ☐ unhappy about your new marriage or relationship
- ☐ abductor's new marriage/relationship
- ☐ unresponsiveness of courts
- ☐ concerns or allegations of abuse
- ☐ different child rearing practices
- ☐ other _____
- ☐ don't know

46. If your child has been recovered/found, were there any consequences for the abductor?

- ☐ criminal charges
- ☐ civil charges
- ☐ custodial rights terminated
- ☐ custodial rights modified
- ☐ no consequences
- ☐ not applicable to my case -- *skip to question # 48*
- ☐ don't know

47. If the abductor was criminally charged, who initiated these charges? Please check all that apply.

- ☐ you
- ☐ police authorities
- ☐ child welfare authorities
- ☐ lawyer
- ☐ don't know

48. Do you think parental abduction should be considered as a form of child abuse?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know -- *skip to question # 50*

49. Can you explain why or why not?

(Use back of page if necessary)

50. Do you think that parental abduction should be treated as a serious criminal offense?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know -- *skip to question # 52*

51. Can you explain why or why not?

(Use back of page if necessary)

52. Are you aware of any social programs or support groups available to help you cope with what has happened? (ie. similar to *Parents Without Partners* or *AA*.)

- ☐ yes
- ☐ not sure -- *skip to question # 54*
- ☐ no

52. Did you seek support from any of them?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no -- *skip to question # 54*

53. What was the name of the group or program?

54. While your child[ren] was [were] was missing, did the other parent contact you?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ s/he contacted me through someone else
- ☐ no — skip to question # 57

55. How did s/he contact you?

- ☐ personally
- ☐ telephone
- ☐ letter
- ☐ e-mail
- ☐ other (specify) _____

56. How often did s/he make contact?

- ☐ daily
- ☐ weekly
- ☐ monthly
- ☐ other (specify) _____

57. Did you know the whereabouts of the child[ren] while they were missing?

- ☐ yes
 - ☐ I thought I did, but later learned that I was mistaken.
- ☐ no

58. Where did the abductor take your child[ren]?

- ☐ somewhere in the same province
- ☐ in another province
- ☐ in the United States
- ☐ somewhere else (specify) _____

☐ don't know

59. Did the other parent move the child[ren] around?

- ☐ remained in one location
- ☐ moved the child[ren] more than two times.
- ☐ moved the child[ren] more than five times.
- ☐ moved the child[ren] more than ten times.
- ☐ don't know

60. How did you get your child[ren] back? Please check all that apply.

- ☐ with the help of the police.
- ☐ with the help of my lawyer.
- ☐ with the help of a missing children's organization.
- ☐ hired a specialist in the field.
- ☐ abductor returned the child[ren]
- ☐ other (specify) _____

61. Did the court play any role in the return of your child?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no — skip to question # 63
- ☐ don't know — skip to question # 63

62. What role did the courts play?

(Use back of page if necessary.)

63. How long was[were] your child[ren] missing?

AFTER THE CHILD[REN] WERE FOUND/RECOVERED

64. Has there been any behavioural changes in your child[ren] since the abduction? Please check all that apply.

- ☐ seems to be unhappy or depressed, more than usual.
- ☐ seems to be withdrawn, more than usual.
- ☐ showing increased signs of anger
- ☐ showing increased signs of aggression
- ☐ is more fearful or anxious
- ☐ is more nervous, high-strung or tense
- ☐ talks openly about how s/he is feeling
- ☐ other (specify) _____

(Use back of page if necessary.)

65. Was there any sign that your child[ren] was[were] abused?

- ☐ yes, signs of emotional abuse
- ☐ yes, signs of sexual abuse
- ☐ yes, signs of neglect
- ☐ there were no signs of abuse -- skip to question # 67
- ☐ don't know -- skip to question # 67

66. How was[were] your child[ren] abused?

(Use back of page if necessary)

67. Did the abductor change the appearance of your child[ren]?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no -- skip to question # 69

68. In what way was your child[ren]'s appearance changed?

(Use back of page if necessary)

69. Did the abductor change the child[ren]'s name[s]?

- ☐ first name only
- ☐ last name only
- ☐ both names
- ☐ no

70. Does/did your child[ren] talk to you about what happened?

- ☐ yes, talks(ed) openly
- ☐ yes, talks(ed) when coaxed to talk
- ☐ talks (ed) to a counselor/therapist
- ☐ no, refuses(ed) to talk

71. After the abduction, did the child[ren] have any contact with the abducting parent?

- ☐ regular visitation
- ☐ supervised visitation
- ☐ contact by letter or phone
- ☐ no contact
- ☐ other (specify) _____

72. Currently does[do] your child[ren] have any contact with the abductor?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no -- skip to question # 74

73. What type of contact does[do] the child[ren] have with the abductor?

(Use back page if necessary)

74. Do you think the abducting parent may try this again?

- ☐ yes -- please explain below
- ☐ don't know
- ☐ no

75. Who would you advise other parents in similar situations to contact? Please check all that apply.

- ☐ police
- ☐ lawyer
- ☐ missing children's organization
- ☐ private investigator
- ☐ other (specify) _____

(Use back page if necessary)

76. Approximately how much did the search for your child[ren] cost?

77. Did you receive financial assistance from anyone to help cover the cost of the search?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no -- skip to question # 79

78. Who helped you with the costs?

(Use back of page if necessary)

79. Was your child taken out of the country?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ don't know -- skip to page 11
- ☐ no -- skip to page 11

INTERNATIONAL ABDUCTION

80. Did you know where the abductor took your child[ren]?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no -- skip to question # 86

81. What country was[were] your child[ren] taken to?

82. Is this where the abductor is from?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ don't know
- ☐ no

83. Did you and the abductor ever live in the country where s/he took your child[ren]?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

84. Did the abductor have friends or family living in the country where s/he took your child[ren]?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know

85. Did you travel to the country where the abductor took your child[ren]?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no, but had contacts there
- ☐ no, but hired someone to go there
- ☐ no, but knew someone there
- ☐ no

86. Do you know what the Hague Convention is?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no -- skip to question # 89

87. Do you know if the country where your child[ren] was[were] taken has ratified with the Hague Convention?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no -- skip to question # 89
- ☐ don't know -- skip to question # 89

88. Do you think this helped with your case?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know

89. Were there cultural differences that caused problems during your relationship?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ occasionally
- ☐ no -- skip to question # 91
- ☐ don't know

90. Do you think cultural differences affected the abductor's decision to take the child[ren]?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ may have contributed to it
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know

91. Was the cultural setting in the country your child[ren] was[were] taken different from the one they were brought up in?

- ☐ yes
 - ☐ slight differences
 - ☐ there were no differences
 - ☐ don't know
 - ☐ other (specify)
-
-

92. Did Canadian officials in the other country help with the return of your child[ren]?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ they tried, but were unsuccessful
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know
- ☐ other (specify)

(Use back of page if necessary)

93. Does your child[ren] have their own passport?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no -- *skip to page 11*
- ☐ don't know -- *skip to page 11*

94. Who provided the passport for the child[ren]?

- ☐ you
 - ☐ the abducting parent -- *skip to question 96*
 - ☐ both parents -- *go to page 11*
 - ☐ don't know -- *go to page 11*
 - ☐ other (specify) -- *go to page 11*
-

95. Was the other parent notified when you obtained the passport for your child[ren]?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know

96. Were you notified when the abducting parent obtained the passport?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

97. What sort of advice would you give to the parents who are searching for their missing child[ren] in other countries? Please use the other side of this page, and the back if necessary.

PARENTAL ABDUCTION

A SILENT PROBLEM IN CANADIAN SOCIETY

The Searching Parent's Perspective

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE SEARCHING PARENT

1. What gender are you?

Male ☐ Female ☐

2. At the time of the abduction, how old were you?

- ☐ under 18
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-31
- ☐ 32-36
- ☐ 36-41
- ☐ 41-50
- ☐ over 50

3. What is your religious affiliation?

- ☐ Protestant
 - ☐ Roman Catholic
 - ☐ Jewish
 - ☐ Hindu
 - ☐ Muslim (Islam)
 - ☐ Other (specify)
-

4. In what country were you born?

5. If born outside Canada, when did you immigrate to Canada?

Year

6. What is your citizenship?

- ☐ Canada, citizen by birth
- ☐ Canada, citizen by naturalization
- ☐ Same country as birth
- ☐ Other (Please Specify)

7. At the time of the abduction what was your educational background?

- ☐ primary school (1-8 yrs)
- ☐ some high-school (9-11 yrs)
- ☐ completed high-school (12 + yrs)
- ☐ some college/university
- ☐ completed college/university (diploma/degree)
- ☐ some post-graduate school
- ☐ post-graduate (degree)
- ☐ other (specify)

8. At the time of the abduction were you employed?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no - skip to question 10

9. If you were working, what kind of work were you doing?

10. At the time of the abduction what was your personal income level?

- ☐ less than 15,000
- ☐ 15,000 to 19,999
- ☐ 20,000 to 24,999
- ☐ 25,000 to 30,999
- ☐ 31,000 to 40,999
- ☐ 41,000 to 50,999
- ☐ 51,000 to 60,000
- ☐ over 60,000

11. Please answer the following chart for each child based on information at the time of the abduction.

Child	Gender M/F	Year Born	What Country S/he Born	Legal Citizenship	Was Child Abducted Y/N
First					
Second					
Third					
Fourth					
Fifth					
Sixth					
Seventh					
Eighth					
Ninth					
Tenth					

(If you have more than ten children please check the box and fill out the same information on the back of this page.)

BACKGROUND OF ABDUCTING PARENT

The purpose of this section is to determine whether or not it is possible to formulate a profile of the abducting parent. Please fill out the answers to the best of your knowledge.

12. Is the abductor the biological parent of the child[ren]?

yes

☐ no, but has legally adopted the children

no

☐ other(specify)

13. Is the abductor?

Male ☐ Female ☐

14. How old was the abductor when s/he took your child[ren]?

☐ under 18

☐ 18-24

☐ 25-31

☐ 32-36

☐ 36-41

☐ 41-50

☐ over 50

15. What is his/her religious affiliation?

☐ Protestant

☐ Roman Catholic

☐ Jewish

☐ Hindu

☐ Muslim (Islam)

☐ Other (specify)

16. In what country was s/he born?

17. If born outside Canada, when did s/he immigrate to Canada?

Year

18. What is his/her citizenship?

☐ Canada, citizen by birth

☐ Canada, citizen by naturalization

☐ Same country as birth

☐ Other (Please Specify)

19. At the time of the abduction what was his/her educational background?

- ☐ primary school (1-8 yrs)
- ☐ some high-school (9-11 yrs)
- ☐ completed high-school (12 + yrs)
- ☐ some college/university
- ☐ completed college/university (diploma/degree)
- ☐ some post-graduate school
- ☐ post-graduate (degree)
- ☐ other (specify) _____

20. At the time of the abduction was s/he employed?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no — skip to question # 22

21. If s/he was employed, what type of work was s/he doing?

22. At the time of the abduction what was his/her approximate income level?

- ☐ less than 15,000
- ☐ 15,000 to 19,999
- ☐ 20,000 to 24,999
- ☐ 25,000 to 30,999
- ☐ 31,000 to 40,999
- ☐ 41,000 to 50,999
- ☐ 51,000 to 60,000
- ☐ over 60,000
- ☐ don't know

23. Did the abductor have a criminal record before s/he took your child[ren]?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know

PRIOR TO THE ABDUCTION

24. Prior to the abduction, were you living with the abductor?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

25. What was your legal marital status at the time of the abduction?

- ☐ married
- ☐ common-law
- ☐ separated
- ☐ divorced
- ☐ widowed
- ☐ single never married

26. During your relationship with the abducting parent, did s/he have problems with any of the following?

- alcohol ☐ yes ☐ no
 - drugs ☐ yes ☐ no
 - physically abusive towards you ☐ yes ☐ no
 - mentally abusive towards you ☐ yes ☐ no
 - sexually abusive towards you ☐ yes ☐ no
 - other (specify) _____
- (Use the back of page if necessary.)

27. How did this affect your relationship?

(Please use back of page if necessary.)
☐ not applicable to my relationship

28. During your relationship with the other parent, did you have problems with any of the following?

- alcohol ☐ yes ☐ no
- drugs ☐ yes ☐ no
- physically abusive toward other parent ☐ yes ☐ no
- mentally abusive toward other parent ☐ yes ☐ no
- sexually abusive towards other parent ☐ yes ☐ no
- other (specify) _____

29. How did this affect your relationship?

(Please use back of page if necessary.)
☐ not applicable to my relationship

30. Was the abductor ever abusive towards the child[ren]? Please provide brief explanation. Use back of the page if necessary.

QUESTIONS 31 TO 33 ARE TO BE FILLED OUT BY PARENTS WHO WERE SEPARATED FROM THE ABDUCTOR AT THE TIME OF THE ABDUCTION. IF YOU WERE STILL WITH THE ABDUCTING PARENT PLEASE GO TO QUESTION # 34

31. Was there a legal custody order in place at the time of the abduction?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no, but there was one pending
- ☐ no -- skip to question # 33
- ☐ don't know -- skip to question # 33

32. At the time of the abduction what type of custody was ordered by the courts?

- ☐ sole custody to the mother
- ☐ sole custody to the father
- ☐ joint physical custody (an equal amount of time with each parent)
- ☐ joint custody
- ☐ primary custody to the mother
- ☐ primary custody to the father
- ☐ don't know

33. Prior to the abduction, what type of contact did the child[ren] have with the abductor?

- ☐ regular visitation
- ☐ irregular visitation
- ☐ only on holidays
- ☐ letter or telephone contact
- ☐ no contact
- ☐ other (specify) _____

34. Was there anything suspicious about the abductor's behaviour before s/he took the child[ren]?

- ☐ yes. (please explain)

(Use back of page if necessary.)

- ☐ no

35. Had s/he ever threatened or talked about abduction before?

- ☐ yes, when we were married
- ☐ yes, after we separated
- ☐ no

36. Did you ever talk about taking your child[ren] from the other parent?

- ☐ yes, when we were married
- ☐ yes, after we separated
- ☐ no

THE ABDUCTION AND EVENTS SURROUNDING IT.

The purpose of this section is to better understand what happened around the time of the abduction.

37. At the time of the abduction where were you living?

- ☐ British Columbia
- ☐ Alberta
- ☐ Saskatchewan
- ☐ Manitoba
- ☐ Ontario
- ☐ Québec
- ☐ New Brunswick
- ☐ Prince Edward Island
- ☐ Nova Scotia
- ☐ Newfoundland
- ☐ North West Territories
- ☐ Yukon
- ☐ other (specify) _____

38. Please indicate when your child went missing.

Day of Week Month Year

39. What time of day was[were] your child[ren] taken?

- ☐ morning
- ☐ afternoon
- ☐ evening
- ☐ during the night
- ☐ don't know

40. Where was[were] your child[ren] taken from?

- ☐ your home
- ☐ abductor's home
- ☐ school/daycare
- ☐ playground
- ☐ child's friend's house
- ☐ other (specify) _____
- ☐ don't know

41. How did you first learn that your child[ren] was[were] abducted?

- ☐ other parent failed to return child[ren] from scheduled visit
- ☐ notified by school that child[ren] was missing
- ☐ notified by abductor's friend/relative
- ☐ notified by abductor
- ☐ other (specify) _____

42. Please indicate who you contacted when you learned that your child[ren] was[were] abducted, and in what order you contacted them.

- ☐ police
- ☐ friends
- ☐ family
- ☐ other parent's family
- ☐ lawyer
- ☐ other (specify) _____

MOTIVATION FOR THE ABDUCTION

43. Do you think the abductor realized what s/he was doing when s/he took your child[ren]?

- ☐ yes. I think s/he planned this
- ☐ yes. but I think it was spontaneous
- ☐ not sure
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know

44. Why do you think the abductor did this? Please check all that apply.

- ☐ to hurt or seek revenge against you
- ☐ pressure from others (ie. family/friends)
- ☐ dissatisfaction with custody decision
- ☐ unhappy about your new marriage or relationship
- ☐ abductor's new marriage/relationship
- ☐ unresponsiveness of courts
- ☐ concerns or allegations of abuse
- ☐ different child rearing practices
- ☐ other (specify) _____

☐ don't know

45. Did s/he give any reason for her/his actions? Please check all that apply.

- ☐ to hurt or seek revenge against you
- ☐ pressure from others (ie. family/friends)
- ☐ dissatisfaction with custody decision
- ☐ unhappy about your new marriage or relationship
- ☐ abductor's new marriage/relationship
- ☐ unresponsiveness of courts
- ☐ concerns or allegations of abuse
- ☐ different child rearing practices
- ☐ other _____
- ☐ don't know

46. If your child has been recovered/found, were there any consequences for the abductor?

- ☐ criminal charges
- ☐ civil charges
- ☐ custodial rights terminated
- ☐ custodial rights modified
- ☐ no consequences
- ☐ not applicable to my case -- skip to question # 48
- ☐ don't know

47. If the abductor was criminally charged, who initiated these charges? Please check all that apply.

- ☐ you
- ☐ police authorities
- ☐ child welfare authorities
- ☐ lawyer
- ☐ don't know

48. Do you think parental abduction should be considered as a form of child abuse?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know -- skip to question # 50

49. Can you explain why or why not?

(Use back of page if necessary)

50. Do you think that parental abduction should be treated as a serious criminal offense?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know -- skip to question # 52

51. Can you explain why or why not?

(Use back of page if necessary)

52. Are you aware of any social programs or support groups available to help you cope with what has happened? (ie. similar to *Parents Without Partners* or AA.)

- ☐ yes
- ☐ not sure -- skip to question # 54
- ☐ no

52. Did you seek support from any of them?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no -- skip to question # 54

53. What was the name of the group or program?

54. Does the abductor contact you?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ s/he contacts me through someone else
- ☐ no -- skip to question # 57

55. How does s/he contact you?

- ☐ personally
- ☐ telephone
- ☐ letter
- ☐ e-mail
- ☐ other (specify) _____

56. How often does s/he make contact?

- ☐ daily
- ☐ weekly
- ☐ monthly
- ☐ other (specify) _____

57. Has/have your child[ren] contacted you?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ contacts me through someone else
- ☐ tried, but was unsuccessful
- ☐ no -- skip to question # 60

58. How does[do] s/he [they] contact you?

- ☐ personally
- ☐ telephone
- ☐ letter
- ☐ e-mail
- ☐ other (specify) _____

59. How often does s/he make contact?

- ☐ daily
- ☐ weekly
- ☐ monthly
- ☐ other (specify) _____

60. Do you know where your child[ren] is[are]?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ I think so
- ☐ no -- skip to question #62

61. Is[are] your child[ren]

- ☐ still in the same province?
- ☐ in another province?
- ☐ in the United States?
- ☐ somewhere else? (specify) _____

62. Do you know if the other parent moves around with the child[ren]?

- ☐ yes, so far moved more than ten times.
- ☐ yes, so far moved more than five times.
- ☐ yes, so far moved more than two times.
- ☐ has remained in one location.
- ☐ don't know

63. Who is involved in the search for your child[ren]? Please check all that apply.

- ☐ local police
- ☐ RCMP
- ☐ police authorities from other countries
- ☐ missing children organizations
- ☐ family, friends
- ☐ lawyer
- ☐ private investigator
- ☐ family courts
- ☐ other (specify) _____

64. How long have you been searching for your child[ren]?

65. Approximately how much money have you spent so far in your search for your child[ren]?

66. Do you know if your child[ren]'s names have been changed?

- ☐ only their first name has been changed
- ☐ only their last name has been changed
- ☐ their first and last name have been changed
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know

67. Do you know if your child[ren]'s physical appearance has been changed?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ don't know -- skip to question # 69
- ☐ no -- skip to question # 69

68. In what way has the abductor changed your child[ren]'s appearance?

(Use back of page if necessary)

- ☐ don't know

69. Has your child been taken out of the country?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ don't know -- skip to page 9
- ☐ no -- skip to page 9

INTERNATIONAL ABDUCTION

70. Do you know where your child[ren] is [are]?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no -- skip to question # 75

71. What country is [are] your child[ren] currently in?

72. Is this the country where the other parent is from?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know

73. Does the abductor have friends or family where s/he is now?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know

74. Have you travelled to the country where your child[ren] is [are]?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no, but planning to go there
- ☐ no, but have contacts there
- ☐ no, but hired someone to go there
- ☐ no

75. Do you know what the Hague Convention is?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no -- skip to question # 77

76. Do you know if the country where your child[ren] is [are] has ratified with the Hague Convention?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know

77. Were there cultural differences that caused problems between you and the abductor?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

78. Do you think cultural differences affected the abductor's decision to take the child[ren]?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ don't know

79. If your child has his/her own passport, who provided it for them?

- ☐ does not have a passport -- skip to page 9
- ☐ you -- skip to page 9
- ☐ abducting parent
- ☐ both parents -- skip to page 9
- ☐ don't know -- skip to page 9
- ☐ other (specify)

79. Were you informed when s/he obtained the passport for your child[ren]?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

This concludes the survey. If there is anything I have not covered or things you want to add, please use the back of this sheet, and attach any additional sheets. If you are willing to discuss your personal experience further in a confidential and anonymous interview, please refer to the bottom of the sheet where I have enclosed my address and phone number. Once again, I want to thank you for taking the time, and emotional effort to fill out this survey. It is only through your experiences that we can find better preventive and interventive measures for parental abduction. I understand that this is a very emotional subject for you to discuss.

I have enclosed a list of phone numbers in case you feel the need to further discuss any issues these questions may have raised. Should you have any further questions regarding this survey, or my research, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Jessie-Lynn MacDonald
419-316 Lorry Greenberg Drive
Ottawa, Ontario
K1T 2P4

Phone: (613) 738-5363

Fax: (613) 738-5363 [Please note, I must be at this number to manually receive the fax]

E-mail: jlmacdon@chat.carleton.ca

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

I _____ agree to participate in the study being conducted by Jessie-Lynn MacDonald of the Sociology Department of Carleton University. I am aware that this study will explore my personal experiences of parental abduction.

I understand that participation in this study will involve one interview that will last approximately two hours.

- This interview will take place at a time and location that is agreeable to me.
- The interview will be taped. The tape will be returned to me or erased at my request.
- Only Jessie-Lynn MacDonald and Dennis Forcese will have access to the audio-tapes.
- My participation is voluntary and I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- I can refuse to answer any question, at any time and still continue to be part of the study.
- My confidentiality will be protected through the elimination of my name and identifying details from the report.
- I am entitled to access the final report. I will receive an executive summary of this study.

I have read the above information and based on this information, I give my consent to participate in this research project providing that all my rights, as described above, will be strictly protected.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

If at any time you need to contact myself or my supervisor please contact:

Jessie-Lynn MacDonald
419-316 Lorry Greenberg Dr.
Ottawa, ON
K1T 2P4
Tel: (613) 738-5363

Dennis Forcese
Department of Sociology, Carleton University
1125 Colonel By Drive
Ottawa, Canada
K1S 5B6
Tel: (613) 520-2600 ext. 2618

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Section One: Before The Abduction

1. How did you meet _____?
2. Can you describe your courtship with him/her?
3. Can you describe your relationship once married? (where applicable)
4. Was there violence in your relationship?
5. Was there conflict over child-rearing beliefs?
6. When did you first become aware of the problems in your relationship?
7. How would you describe the other parent's involvement with the children?

IF SEPARATED

7. Was it a mutual decision to terminate the relationship?
8. How long were you together before you separated?
9. What was the abductor's involvement with the children after the separation?
10. Was there a lot of conflict regarding custody of the children?

Section Two: The Abduction and the Events Surrounding It?

1. Did you suspect that _____ would abduct your child[ren]?
2. What was your relationship with the abductor like just prior to the event?
3. Can you describe how you found out about the abduction?
4. Can you describe how you felt at this time?
5. Who did you turn to for help?

Section Three: The Search

1. Can you describe the steps you took once you discovered that your child[ren] was missing?
2. Who was helpful during your search?
3. What did you think of the community response to the abduction?
4. How would you describe the police response to the abduction?
5. Do you feel that policies adequately address parental abduction?
6. Did (do) you know the whereabouts of your children while they were missing?
7. If so, how did you learn of their whereabouts?
8. How are you coping with the abduction?
9. Why do you think _____ (the abductor) did this?

Section Four: Recovered Children (For Subjects Whose Children Have Been Returned)

1. How did you get your child back?
2. Did your child recognize you when s/he first saw you?
3. Was your child's appearance changed in any way?

4. Did you find that the reunification with _____ (the child) difficult?
5. How would you describe _____ since his/her return?
6. Was there evidence of how your child was treated while missing?
7. Do you know how the abductor explained your absence?
8. Can you describe your relationship with _____ since the abduction?
9. Who has legal custody of _____ now?
10. Was _____ exposed to cultural differences while missing?
11. Does _____ (the abductor) have contact with _____ (the child) now?
12. Can you describe your relationship with the abductor now?
13. Do you think the abduction has had any effect on _____ (the child)?
14. How do you think the abduction has affected you?
15. How do you cope with what has happened?
16. Were there any consequences for abductor for his/her actions?

Is there anything you would like to share about your experience?

Are there any major issues that you feel I have not adequately addressed in this interview?

Thank-you for taking the time to share your experiences with me. [Turn tape recorder off].

Do a short debrief with the interview subject.

- i) Any comments about the interview?
- ii) Would subject like an executive summary of the study upon completion?

IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)

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