

Are Child Abduction Policies  
Universally Beneficial in Investigating  
and Solving Highly Publicized Cases  
like Madeleine McCann?

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# Case Analysis- Madeleine McCann

- May 3, 2007
- On vacation with family and friends that included nine adults and children, 3-year-old Madeleine McCann was abducted from a vacation apartment in Praia de Luz Lagos, Portugal in the middle of the night by a stranger
  - There were multiple eyewitness reports of possible sightings of Madeleine with a white male but those were inconclusive causing the case to go cold in 2008
- Disappearance and case sparked global interest and grief with her picture plastered throughout newsfeeds and media
- The case reopened in 2013 leading to a potential sketch of a suspect that resulted in the identification
  - As of 2022 the Portuguese officials had declared 'Christian B.' as a formal suspect but no conclusive evidence can be used against him at this time



# History of Child Abduction

Abduction is a general term to describe an incident when a child is taken against their will (Spilman 2006)

- Different subcategories depending on the perpetrator of the crime
  - Family abduction occurs when a child is taken by a parent, family member or other form of guardian (Spilman 2006)
  - Stranger or non-familiar acquaintance without permission of the guardian
  - Stereotypical abduction is considered the most dangerous and is typically performed by a stranger that “occurs in conjunction with ransom, murder, or with the intent to keep the child permanently” (Collie and Greene 2016; Spilman 2006)

Kidnapping is generally done with the intention of returning the child or individual once a ransom is paid by the parents of the child (Spilman 2006)

# Risk Factors & Consequences of Child Abduction

- Victims of child abductions whether it be by a family member or stranger, are typically younger than the age of eighteen
- White females are typically the victims with an estimate of about 70% of all cases reported that year (Finkelhor, Hammer, and Sedlak 2002)
- Majority of the perpetrators were strangers who had prior criminal history
  - Typically done by white men in their thirties but the children are usually found dead or presumed dead (Warren et al, 2020)
- Consequences
  - Risks of family and friends of the victim to suffer from traumatic stress and emotional damage
  - Can cause physical and psychological harm to the victims who haven't found



# Role of the Media

- Media representation contributes to shaping the opinions of the people by presenting a particular view of reality
- The use of social media to report child abductions enacts fear within the public
  - Portraying numerous faces of young children on television screens and showing victims' family giving remarks about their children can affect the communities' emotions and causes stress
  - High profile stranger abduction cases vividly displayed in the media can trigger fear in almost all parents

# U.S. Policies or Practices

AMBER Alert

Bystander effect

Sex offender registries

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

National Incident-Based Reporting System

National Crime Information Center

# International Policies & Practices

Hague Convention on  
the Civil Aspects of  
International Child  
Abduction

Convention of 25  
October 1980 on the  
Civil Aspects of  
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Abduction

# References

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