



## Physical Anthropology Section – 2008

### H123 A Population Approach to the Problem of the Missing and Unidentified With Emphasis on the Status of Migrant and Undocumented Workers

Erin H. Kimmerle, PhD\*, University of South Florida, Department of Anthropology, 4202 East Fowler, Soc 107, Tampa, FL 33820; Anthony B. Falsetti, PhD, C.A. Pound Human Id Laboratory, C/O Cancer/ Genetics Research, PO Box 103615, Gainesville, FL 32610; and Ann H. Ross, PhD, North Carolina State University, Sociology and Anthropology, Campus Box 8107, Raleigh, NC 27695-8107

The objectives of this paper are to discuss the problem of unidentified decedents and strategies at the local and state level to improve identification methods. Special attention is given to the role of families through this process and the importance of the information they provide. The purpose of the study is to use a population based approach to profile the missing, such as immigrants, migrants and un-documented workers to better serve these underrepresented groups. A demographic analysis of solved and unsolved cases from the American Southeast is presented.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by. Using the American Southeast as an exemplar will serve as a model for others to employ. Further, framing the problem of the unidentified with research and outreach initiatives aimed towards population specific methods and protocols should improve the identification process.

**Outcomes:** Using the American Southeast as an exemplar will serve as a model for others to employ. Further, framing the problem of the unidentified with research and outreach initiatives aimed towards population specific methods and protocols should improve the identification process.

The FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC), Missing Person and Unidentified Person files (as of December 31, 2006) reports 110,484 recorded active missing person cases and 6,208 unidentified person cases, which is a 2.2% increase over reported cases from 2005. Within the Unidentified Person File, 73.81% (n=1,043) of cases are of unidentified, deceased individuals; 0.5 % (n=7) are unidentified catastrophe victims; and 25.69% (n=363) of cases include living but unidentified persons. However, experts estimate that there are approximately 40,000 to 50,000 unidentified sets of human remains in the United States, which highlights a significant problem in that only 1.24% of the unidentified remains are accounted for by the NCIC database. Local and State level databanks account for some of this discrepancy, offering a variety of alternative means to share information about the deceased in hope that a witness or family member will come forward and offer information. For example, the Florida Unidentified Decedents Database (FLUIDDB) has more than 500 open cases in the state of Florida alone.

The number of cases that remain unidentified is due in part to the low priority and attention given to "cold cases", the overall accuracy and applicability of identification methods ranging from the initial parameters of biological profiles to DNA analysis, the access families have to information and knowledge about Unidentified and Missing persons, and the willingness or ability of witnesses or family members to come forward. The pool of persons who go missing and subsequently become part of the unidentified population is predominately adult, male, under-represented minorities, foreign-born individuals, and people from at-risk groups (i.e. the elderly, mentally ill, or individuals with substance abuse). In particular, a growing obstacle to the identification of unidentified decedents (UIDs) is the increase of foreign-born immigrants, including migrant workers and un-documented persons in the United States. Increasingly, individuals of foreign born Nationality, is an important component in unidentified cases as there may not be access to information about who is missing, personal data about the decedent, nor family members available to aid the identification process.

The demographic structures of identified cases are compared with unidentified cases and the reported missing. The demographic profiles of individuals identified through the C.A. Pound Human Identification Laboratory at the University of Florida, the Forensic Data Bank maintained at The University of Tennessee and the Medical Examiner's Offices of Georgia and North Carolina are compared. The value of a population approach to individual estimation is demonstrated through demographic analysis and a comparative discussion of population variables of the Missing and Unidentified; as well as the databases and processes in place aimed towards human identification in the United States. Recommendations for policy and methodological changes are further discussed such as the application of population based research strategies that account for biological and cultural variation related to identification parameters; the development of bilingual searchable databases with anonymous information submittal capabilities; and the incorporation of biological information of the decedent along with possible biological traits and personal or cultural artifacts such as descriptions and photographs of personal effects, tattoos, and facial approximations into searchable web-based databases that facilitates the monumental task of identifying unidentified or unknown decedents in a way that is appropriate given the population in question.

#### Identification, Unidentified Decedents, Demography