



E53 Child Abduction Murder: Regional Differences in Time to Death and Offender Motivation

Katherine M. Brown, PhD, Tarleton State University, Dept of Criminal Justice, 6777 Camp Bowie Boulevard, Ste 500, Fort Worth, TX 76116*

After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the differences in child abduction murders across the United States. Information from United States regions and states will be the focus of this presentation.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by adding geographically specific information to an under-researched area, child abduction murder investigations. Specifically, this presentation will identify geographic differences in how long children were kept alive after abduction and offender motivation. This presentation will also provide investigators with a better idea of how long different age categories of children were kept alive after they were abducted as well as differences in time to death by gender and geographic location.

There are relatively few empirical studies on child abduction murder.¹⁻⁴ In particular, little research has addressed the influence of time and distance on case solvability in murder investigations of abducted children.^{1,2} To date, only one study has addressed the impact of forensic evidence on child abduction murder investigation solvability.⁵ No studies have provided detailed information on child abduction murders by exploring geographic location differences.

The geographic differences in child abduction murders were explored by examining child abduction murders occurring from 1968 to 2002 (N=735) across the United States. The following geographic locations are the primary focus of this presentation: Texas, Washington State, Wisconsin, and the Northeast Region (consisting of New England and Mid-Atlantic States). Geographic differences were explored by analyzing the time between when the child was abducted and when the child was killed. Differences were also examined by victim gender and age-group category.

An added challenge to child abduction investigations is that there typically is a time lapse between when a child goes missing and when that child is reported missing to police. While approximately 40% of children were reported missing within two hours, the remaining 60% were not.³ Children are killed quickly after abduction in child abduction murders. Prior analyses indicate that as the victim's age increases, the time span between when the victim is abducted and when the murder occurs does not always increase. Abducted children who were murdered were typically killed within three hours (76.2%).¹⁻⁴ Young children between the ages of 0 years to 5 years old were killed within three hours at a higher percentage than the other age groups (81.8%, $p > .05$). Young children (0 years to 5 years old) were killed more quickly than middle childhood victims (6 years to 11 years old), young teenagers (12 years to 14 years), and older teenagers (15 years to 17 years); however, there are distinct geographic differences in how long children in each age-group category are kept alive after an abduction.

Analyses by geographic location indicate that offenders may also have differing motivations by region. For instance, killers in the Wisconsin region committed a higher percentage of sexual assault on their victims than other regions. Geographic-specific findings provide valuable information to investigators in the absence of other leads or evidence. Most child abduction murders are crimes of opportunity; therefore, knowledge about regional differences in offender motivation will provide valuable investigative direction in the absence of other leads. In addition, differences in the time an abductor keeps a victim alive by age group and gender may provide insight into region-specific investigative challenges. This examination adds to the literature on how time and distance operate within child abduction murder investigations occurring in different locations. Because time and distance are critical solvability factors in child abduction murder investigations, this study provides valuable information for homicide detectives who may need to change investigation strategies and tools to respond to child abduction murder geographic differences.



General Section - 2016

Reference(s):

1. Brown K.M. *Child abduction murder: an analysis of the effect of victim-offender relationship, age, gender, forensic evidence, and time and distance separation on case solvability*. 2008 Doctoral dissertation. Available in ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database (UMI No. 3329504), and Dissertation Abstracts International Section A. Humanities and Social Sciences, 69(9-A), 2009, 3748.
 2. Brown K.M., Keppel R.D. Child abduction murder: An analysis of the effect of time and distance separation between murder incident sites on solvability. *J. Forensic Sci.* 2007; 52(1): 137-145.
 3. Brown K.M., Keppel R.D., Weis J.G., Skeen M. *Investigative case management for missing children homicides: Report II*. (Cooperative Agreement 93-MC-CX-K006). Olympia, WA: Attorney General of Washington 2006.
 4. Hanfland K.A., Keppel R.D., Weis J.G. *Investigative case management for missing children homicides*. Attorney General of Washington; 1997 Cooperative Agreement 93-MC-CX-K006.
 5. Brown K.M., Keppel R.D. Child abduction murder: The impact of forensic evidence on case solvability. *J. Forensic Sci.* 2012; 57(2): 353-363. doi: 10.1111/j.1556-4029.2011.01970.x
-

Child Abduction Murder, Time to Death, Geographic Differences