

Understanding the Complexities of Non-Familial Child Abductions: A Systematic Literature Review on the Behavioural Characteristics of Acquaintance and Stranger Abductors.

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| Journal: | <i>Journal of Criminal Psychology</i> |
| Manuscript ID | JCP-01-2023-0004.R1 |
| Manuscript Type: | Research Paper |
| Keywords: | Child abduction, offence characteristics, kidnapping, child sexual abuse, child homicide, stranger |
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Manuscripts

MANUSCRIPT DETAILS

TITLE: Understanding the Complexities of Non-Familial Child Abductions: A Systematic Literature Review on the Behavioural Characteristics of Acquaintance and Stranger Abductors.

ABSTRACT:

Reports from 2016-2017 suggest that approximately 870 cases of non-familial child abduction (NFA) are recorded in England and Wales per year. Yet, empirical knowledge of the victims, offenders, and offence characteristics is limited in comparison to other forms of child victimisation. Furthermore, much of the available knowledge is constrained by a lack of clarity around the differences between acquaintance and stranger abductors. This systematic literature review aimed to develop a comprehensive overview of acquaintance and stranger abductions, focussing on the similarities and differences in offending behaviours.

Research databases (PsyArticles, Google Scholar, Science Direct, PsychINFO, Criminal Justice Abstracts, MEDLINE, and ERIC) and the Grey Literature (ETHOS and EBSCO) were screened for peer-reviewed research published between 1995 and 2018. Sixteen articles met the inclusion criteria and were critically appraised using a modified version of the Joanna Briggs Institute Checklist for Case Reports.

Six key areas within NFA offences and their characteristics were identified as offering potential for differentiating acquaintance and stranger abductors: victim-offender relationship, number of victims and offenders, motives, modus operandi, victim injury, sexual assault, and mechanism of death (in fatal cases). The results of this review are discussed with consideration given to investigative implications, limitations, and directions for future study.

CUST_RESEARCH_LIMITATIONS/IMPLICATIONS_(LIMIT_100_WORDS) :No data available.

CUST_PRACTICAL_IMPLICATIONS_(LIMIT_100_WORDS) :No data available.

CUST_SOCIAL_IMPLICATIONS_(LIMIT_100_WORDS) :No data available.

This paper is the first to systematically review the current NFA literature, from which pragmatic recommendations for practice and future academic enquiry are drawn.

Supplementary Material

Table 1 Quality appraisal of included sources (N =16)

| Source | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|------------------------------|-----|---|---|---|-----|---|---|---|
| Gallagher et al (2008) | n | y | y | n | y | y | n | n |
| Miller et al. (2008) | n | y | y | n | u | y | y | n |
| Shelton et al. (2016) | y | y | y | y | n/a | y | u | u |
| Tillyer et al. (2015) | y | y | n | n | y | y | u | n |
| Walsh et al. (2016) | n | y | n | n | y | y | y | n |
| Warren et al. (2016) | y | y | y | n | y | y | y | n |
| Asdigian et al. (1995) | n | y | n | y | y | y | u | n |
| Beasley et al. (2009) | n | y | y | n | y | y | y | n |
| Beyer & Beasley (2003) | n/a | y | y | n | n/a | y | n | n |
| Boudreaux et al. (1999) | y | y | n | n | y | y | y | n |
| Brown & Keppel (2012) | n | y | n | n | n | y | n | n |
| Collie & Greene (2017) | y | y | y | n | y | y | y | n |
| Collie & Greene (2018) | n | y | n | y | y | y | n | n |
| Erickson & Friendship (2002) | n | n | y | n | y | y | u | n |
| Warren et al. (2021) | y | y | y | n | y | y | y | n |
| Park & Cho (2019) | N | y | n | y | n/a | y | n | n |

Appraisal Items

1. Were the terms abduction, acquaintance, and stranger clearly defined?
2. Were the demographic offender and/or victim characteristics clearly described?
3. Were the offender and the victim histories (for instance offending history / victimisation history) presented?
4. Was the abduction MO described?
5. Were any comparison groups clearly described?
6. Were the statistical analysis and results clearly described?

7. Were offence characteristics described in relation to demographic details?
8. Does the article provide a profile of stranger and/or acquaintance abductors?

Journal of Criminal Psychology

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3 **Understanding the Complexities of Non-Familial **Child** Abductions: A Systematic**
4 **Literature Review on the Behavioural Characteristics of Acquaintance and Stranger**
5 **Abductors.**
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10 **Abstract**
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13 **Purpose:** Reports from 2016-2017 suggest that approximately 870 cases of non-familial
14 **child** abduction (NFA) are recorded in England and Wales per year. Yet, empirical
15 knowledge of the victims, offenders, and offence characteristics is limited in comparison to
16 other forms of child victimisation. Furthermore, much of the available knowledge is
17 constrained by a lack of clarity around the differences between acquaintance and stranger
18 abductors. This systematic literature review aimed to develop a comprehensive overview of
19 acquaintance and stranger child abductions, focussing on the similarities and differences in
20 offending behaviours.
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30 **Methods:** Research databases (**PsycArticles**, Google Scholar, Science Direct, PsycINFO,
31 Criminal Justice Abstracts, MEDLINE, and ERIC) and the Grey Literature (ETHOS and
32 EBSCO) were screened for peer-reviewed research published between 1995 and 2018.
33 Sixteen articles met the inclusion criteria and were critically appraised using a modified
34 version of the Joanna Briggs Institute Checklist for Case Reports.
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41 **Findings:** Six key areas within NFA offences and their characteristics were identified as
42 offering potential for differentiating acquaintance and stranger abductors: victim-offender
43 relationship, number of victims and offenders, motives, modus operandi, victim injury, sexual
44 assault, and mechanism of death (in fatal cases). The results of this review are discussed
45 with consideration given to investigative implications, limitations, and directions for future
46 study.
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55 **Originality:** This paper is the first to systematically review the current NFA literature, from
56 which pragmatic recommendations for practice and future academic enquiry are drawn.
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Key Words: *Child abduction, offence characteristics, kidnapping, child sexual abuse, child homicide*

1. Introduction

Child abductions present a social issue that commands considerable public interest; they are one of the most distressing events a parent can experience (Spillman, 2006), often eliciting heightened anxiety, rage and helplessness (Hegar & Greif, 1991). The outcomes are even more adverse for the victims. Of those that are located and returned home, many display long term symptoms of fright, rage, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Finkelhor et al., 2017), which can manifest into behavioural and emotional problems in adulthood (Greif, 2000).

Whilst most familial abductions (FA) are perpetrated by an aggrieved family member within the context of a custodial dispute (though sexually motivated cases of FA do exist; Finkelhor et al., 2002), non-familial abductions (NFA) encompass a wider array of criminal motives inclusive of sexual assault and homicide (Ioannou & Hammond, 2015; Newiss & Traynor, 2013), with most of these offences being sexually motivated (Warren et al., 2021). The complex and harrowing nature of NFAs have led to greater empirical concern about the motivations, actions and investigative responses to such forms of abduction.

In terms of prevalence, the National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children-2 (NISMA2) estimated that 58,200 incidences of NFA occurred in the US between 1997 and 1999 (Shutt et al., 1997). UK incidence rates are comparatively lower. UK police records suggest that NFA rates are gradually rising with 870 cases recorded between 2016-2017 (Newiss, 2018). These general statistics however do not include attempts and do not reflect the unknown number of cases that go unreported, primarily as a result of shame or self-blame exhibited by the victim and their family (Gallagher et al., 2008). Further, the rigid crime classification procedures used by investigators (see Home Office Classification Index, 2020) fail to distinctively quantify NFA offences that co-

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3 occur with other crimes. That is, child abduction offences involving severe and fatal
4 outcomes are classified by the most serious offence (such as sexual assault and, or
5 murder), and as a result are often missed in prevalence research. Therefore, it is argued that
6 the available statistics do not truly represent the complexity of NFA.
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12 NFA offences can be committed by offenders who are either strangers or acquaintances of
13 the victim (or victim's family), however, investigative records often fail to differentiate these
14 offences by victim-offender relationship type. This can be problematic for both investigators
15 and academics who may rely on the data for research, as a growing body of research
16 suggests that stranger and acquaintance child abductions may represent distinct differences
17 in offending behaviours and motivation (Colbert, 2011; Collie & Greene, 2017; Finkelhor &
18 Ormrod, 2000; Miller et al., 2008;). To date however, no research has comprehensively
19 considered existing research on NFA, with a view to **determine** the characteristics pertinent
20 to acquaintance and stranger abductors.
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31 *1.1. Child Abduction Murder*

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34 When cases of NFA are committed, murder is often the main concern of the abductee's
35 parents (Finkelhor et al., 1992). This fear however appears to be disproportionate to the
36 risk. Although there are no definitive statistics on the number of NFA cases that result in
37 murder, academics have stated that child abduction murders (CAM) are extremely rare
38 (Finkelhor & Ormrod, 2000; Hanfland et al., 1997), representing approximately 8% of short-
39 term NFA (Finkelhor et al., 1990). Some academics, however, suggest that such CAM figures
40 do not accurately reflect the true rates. This is because when children are recovered
41 deceased, the murder investigation takes precedence over the abduction and missing child
42 reports are unlikely to be completed retrospectively (Beasley et al., 2009; Warren et al.,
43 2020).
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56 The pressures upon investigating forces to recover an abducted child before any harm
57 befalls them is often overlooked publicly, and empirically. This pressure is further amplified
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3 by findings which suggest that in fatal cases, 90% of victims are killed within 24 hours
4 (Brown et al., 1997); even for those who are eventually found, research has shown that
5 longer periods of abduction equate to greater emotional trauma and more difficulties with
6 recovery (Greif & Hegar, 1992; Plass et al., 1996). Thus, as Warren et al. (2021) posit, one
7 of the most important questions that arises following a child abduction is whether the victim
8 will be found alive or (presumed) deceased. As the outcome of child abductions are likely to
9 be shrouded in uncertainty, this gives investigating officers a limited window of opportunity to
10 potentially recover the victim alive. Therefore, the elicitation of offence and offender
11 characteristics predictive of homicidal risk in child abductions could be impactful for
12 investigative practice. Unfortunately, the existing literature on NFA and CAM is limited, and
13 factors which may assist investigating forces in lines of enquiry such as factors differentiating
14 acquaintance and stranger abductors, as well as fatal and non-fatal cases is further limited.
15 A systematic review on the limited empirical knowledge around NFA offence characteristics
16 is warranted, to identify salient offence attributes that may be of importance for the elicitation
17 of an offender's characteristics, motives, and intentions.

18 *1.2. Current Study*

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20 The primary aim of this review was to synthesise the existing literature on NFA, and,
21 specifically, to explore the offending behaviours and characteristics of acquaintance and
22 stranger abductors. Systematic literature reviews offer a comprehensive and critical
23 overview of available evidence and have been used to provide pragmatic recommendations
24 towards policy and practice (Hudspith et al., 2021; Debowska et al., 2017; Mojtahedi et al.,
25 2022). Our aim was operationalised into three objectives. Firstly, to identify what similarities
26 and differences exist in the offence characteristics of the two sub-types (acquaintance and
27 stranger abductors). It was also anticipated that characteristics of CAM may be evident in
28 some of the existing literature, therefore the second objective was to highlight the similarities
29 and differences in the offence characteristics of non-fatal and fatal abductions.

30 Notwithstanding variations in the legal frameworks within the US, as well as between the UK
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3 and the US, as most of the literature uses US data samples, the third objective was to
4 highlight consistencies and inconsistencies between the US and UK literature, and any other
5 countries identified in the literature search. This review therefore discusses studies of NFA,
6 including CAM, and offence characteristics in general.
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11 12 13 14 15 **2. Method.**

16 17 18 *2.1. Search Strategy*

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20 This review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA guidelines (Moher,
21 Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Attman, 2009) and pre-registered with PROSPERO (Registration
22 Number CRD42019149768) on 18TH September 2019. Electronic searches of the Cochrane
23 Database of Systematic Reviews and the Campbell Collaboration library yielded no
24 systematic reviews of the characteristics of acquaintance and stranger abductors. The
25 following online full-text databases were searched; PsycArticles, Science Direct, PsycINFO,
26 Criminal Justice Abstracts, MEDLINE, and ERIC. A search of the Grey Literature was also
27 conducted through ETHOS and EBSCO.
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38 The following search string was constructed to capture relevant studies; '(child* OR
39 teen* OR adolescent OR minor) AND (kidnap* OR abduct*) AND (stranger OR acquaintance
40 OR nonfamily* OR nonfamilial* OR nonparental* OR homicide OR murder)'. The first search
41 term was applied to article titles, whereas the second and third search terms were applied to
42 any domain of the article. Additionally, search parameters for publication date were set from
43 1st January 1994, to 11th January 2023. This timeframe was used because the child
44 abduction literature began emerging in the early 1980's following a string of child
45 disappearances and CAM cases in the US (see the case of Etan Patz). Early studies mainly
46 focussed on incidence (see Finkelhor et al., 1992) rather than the characteristics of the
47 offence and offenders. Some studies identifying NFA characteristics however do date back
48 to 1995 (see Asdigian et al., 1995).
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2.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were eligible for inclusion if they were either peer-reviewed and empirical in nature, or a case study published in English, dated between 1994 and 2023, which included details of a NFA offences. Studies were also required to present discussions of offending populations who committed NFA offences and/or the CAM of a victim aged between two and eighteen. Studies involving children aged younger than two years were excluded as existing research suggests that this age group of victims represent a distinct type of abduction motivated by maternal desire (Ankrom & Lent, 1995; Burgess & Lanning, 1995; Erickson & Friendship, 2002; Shelton, Hilts, & Mackizer, 2016; Warren et al., 2016). Studies were also excluded if they focussed on the abduction of children in the context of war and armed conflict. The reference lists of included articles were also hand searched to identify any literature not identified within database searches. A search of bibliographic databases was conducted in January 2023. Searches resulted in the identification of 907 articles. Two reviewers independently pre-selected the relevant articles from the titles and abstracts based on the selection criteria. In case of discrepancies between the two reviewers, the reference was held for deeper evaluation in the next phase (using full text). Any remaining discrepancies were discussed and resolved. There was an 88.9% agreement rate between the reviewers and sixteen articles were included for review (marked with an asterisk in the references). The process of selection is depicted in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 here

2.3. Quality Appraisal and Data Extraction

A quality assessment of the sixteen remaining studies was conducted by two researchers using the Joanna Briggs Institute (2017) *Checklist for Case Reports*. The items in the Checklist for case reports were modified to meet the aims of this review. The quality of included studies was assessed across eight domains: 1) clear definitions of acquaintance and stranger offenders, 2) clear descriptions of offender and victim characteristics, 3)

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3 discussion of victimisation or offending histories, 4) discussion of the offenders Modus
4 Operandi (MO), a clear description of; 5) comparison groups, 6) statistical analyses, 7)
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6 offence characteristics, and 8) the provision of emerging acquaintance and stranger profiles.
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8 There was an 82.35% inter-rater agreement in quality appraisal and all discrepancies were
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10 discussed and resolved by the research team. For the purpose of our review, data specific to
11
12 the following areas was extracted; victim-offender relationship, and detail of offence
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14 characteristics and offence outcome. Results were presented and discussed in accordance
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16 to checklist items set out within Moher et al's., (2009) PRISMA statement. Any limitations or
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18 risks of bias (within individual studies and across the articles) that were identified are
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20 acknowledged within the results.
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25 **3. Results**

26 *3.1. Sample metadata and quality appraisal*

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28 The 16 studies were published between 1995 and 2020 in 12 different journals (see Table
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30 1). Table two presents the methodological characteristics of the included studies. The
31
32 majority of the studies ($n = 11$) were based on US cases, four studies used UK cases and
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34 one study analysed data from South Korea. The date parameters for the data used spanned
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36 from 1968 to 2014 but was unidentifiable in four studies (Beasley et al., 2009; Beyer &
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38 Beasley, 2003; Warren et al., 2016; Warren et al., 2021). The number of cases varied (range
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40 32 - 29,293) with most studies analysing between 50 and 800 cases. The total sample size
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42 of all included studies could not be calculated due to the use of different methodologies and
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44 potential duplications of cases across the studies.
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55 The methodological quality of the studies was generally high, aims were clearly presented,
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57 and the data analysis and results were clearly described in all sixteen studies. Apart from
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59 one study (Erickson & Friendship, 2002), all sources provided detailed descriptions of
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3 offender and victim demographics, however, the offence/victimisation history of the offenders
4 and victims were only considered in nine studies. Although most studies provided some
5 information about offence characteristics, only seven studies considered these findings in
6 relation to offender characteristics and the modus operandi (MO) of offenders was only
7 explored in four studies, though this could be somewhat expected given that the MO of
8 offenders may not be apparent to investigators and thus, not recorded. Only six studies
9 clearly defined and differentiated between stranger and acquaintance abductors within their
10 investigations and no study was able to provide detailed offender characteristic differences
11 between stranger and acquaintance offenders (i.e. profiles), signalling a clear gap within the
12 literature. A full breakdown of the quality appraisals can be found in the supplementary
13 materials.
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26 27 3.2. Empirical Findings 28

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30 Through the analysis of the 16 articles, three overarching empirical themes were identified:
31 Offender-victim dynamic (relationship between the offenders and victims in NFA research,
32 as well as the number of offenders and victims involved in offences), motive (consideration
33 towards the varying motives behind NFA, namely, sexual assault and homicide), and
34 offender actions (explorations of methods used by offenders to carry out their offences,
35 including sexual assault behaviours and causes of death in cases of child abduction
36 murder).
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45 3.2.1. *Victim-Offender Dynamic* 46

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48 **3.2.1.1. *Victim-Offender Relationships.*** Inconsistency regarding the operationalisation of
49 NFA victim-offender relation types was observed across the selected studies. Whilst three
50 studies examined NFA collectively (e.g., Erickson & Friendship, 2002; Gallagher et al., 2008;
51 Park & Cho, 2019) and two studies solely examined stranger abductions (Collie & Greene,
52 2017; 2019) the remaining articles differentiated NFA cases based on relationship type. Most
53 of these studies did so using a stranger/acquaintance (or stereotypical/legal definition, see
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3 Asdigian et al., 1995) dichotomy (Boudreaux et al., 1999; Brown & Keppel; Miller et al.,
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5 2018; Tillyer et al., 2015). Some of these studies included additional categories as well, such
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7 as current or former intimate partner (Shelton et al., 2015; Walsh et al., 2016; Warren et al.,
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9 2016), and victim or family friend (Shelton et al., 2015). Two of the studies did not
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11 differentiate between relationship types at all (e.g., Beasley et al., 2009; Beyer & Beasley,
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13 2003).
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16 Findings from studies which compared familial to non-familial cases suggest that most child
17
18 abduction offences are committed by non-familial offenders. This was observed among UK
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20 (82% NFA, Erickson & Friendship, 2002;), Korean (73.6% NFA, Park & Cho, 2019) and US
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22 (47.3% strangers & 42% acquaintances, Warren et al., 2021) samples. However, Walsh et
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24 al., (2016) produced conflicting findings which indicated that most child abductions in the US
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26 are committed by family members (48%), followed by acquaintances (27%), strangers
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28 (16%), and the victim's boyfriend/girlfriend (9%). The disparity between studies indicates that
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30 findings derived from child abduction research is heavily dependent on the database sources
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32 used, thus, inter-study comparisons should be made cautiously.
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36 **3.2.1.2. Number of Victims and Offenders.** The number of victims involved in NFA
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38 offences appeared to vary by whether the offence was attempted or completed. The
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40 literature suggests that most attempted child abductions are carried out against an individual
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42 victim (Warren et al., 2021), who is not in the company of other children or adults (Collie &
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44 Greene, 2017). An exception to this is a US study of residential child abduction (see Shelton
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46 et al., 2016), and UK cases which also involved sexual assault where more than two-thirds
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48 of offences occurred when the victim was with other children (Gallagher et al., 2008). US
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50 research elaborates on these findings further suggesting that offences against multiple child
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52 victims were not predictive of non-fatal or fatal outcomes (Beasley et al., 2009). However,
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54 Beasley and colleagues found that the abduction of both a child and an adult made it more
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56 likely they would be found alive.
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3 The literature is also inconsistent regarding the number of offenders. Research by Gallagher
4 et al., (2008) and Warren et al. (2021) suggest that most NFA offences involve a lone
5 offender, however, Walsh et al., (2016) found that all abduction types were more likely to
6 involve multiple offenders. Walsh et al.'s findings also accord with offenders in CAM cases
7 (see Asdigian et al., 1995; Beasley et al., 2009). Gallagher and colleagues noted that in
8 cases involving multiple offenders, just over half involving a female offender (52.5%), also
9 involved a male offender. Comparatively, only 6.6% of offences involving a male offender
10 also involved a female offender. When attempting to differentiate by category of offending
11 groups (adult, young people, and children), no significant differences regarding number of
12 offenders was observed.
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25 3.2.2. *Motive*

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27 NFA motivations included maternal desire (Boudreaux et al., 1999; Erickson &
28 Friendship, 2002; Shelton et al., 2016; Warren et al., 2016), sexual gratification/assault
29 (Asdigian et al., 1995; Boudreaux et al., 1999; Miller, et al., 2008), financial gain/extortion
30 (Asdigian et al., 1995; Boudreaux et al., 1999; Miller et al., 2008) and revenge/retribution
31 (Asdigian et al., 1995), which all appear to be differentiated by victim gender and age.
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33 Whilst female offenders make up a small percentage of child abductors (5.7%; Warren et al.,
34 2021), many of them are motivated by maternal desires, typically targeting infants with the
35 intent of keeping the child permanently (Boudreaux, et al., 1999). Such findings fit with
36 Warren et al's. (2021) observation that children under the age of six were more likely to be
37 abducted for longer than eight hours compared to older children, although this could be
38 attributed to other motives, given that the sample involved mostly male offenders. Motives
39 consistent with retribution and financial gain are considerably rare in modern society (see
40 Asdigian et al., 1995; Boudreaux et al., 1999) and usually occur within the context of
41 acquisitive criminality. These cases often involve older teenage victims, with both the
42 offender and victim often being male (see Asdigian et al., 1995; Boudreaux et al., 1999;
43 Miller et al., 2008).
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3 The majority of NFA however appears to be sexual motivated. US and UK findings suggest
4 that sexually motivated abductions account for approximately two-thirds of NFA (Boudreaux
5 et al., 1999; Erickson & Friendship, 2002), and are even more prevalent (92%) when
6 focussing on female victims (Warren et al., 2021). Most studies identify girls aged 14-18
7 years of age as the most common targets of sexual motivated abductions (Boudreaux et al.,
8 1999; Miller et al., 2008; Warren et al., 2021), however one study on UK abductions failed to
9 replicate this gender association (Erickson & Friendship, 2002). Warren et al. (2021) also
10 asserted that sexually motivated abductions were more likely to involve a fatal outcome in
11 comparison to non-sexually motivated abductions.
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14 There is a contrast between acquaintance and stranger abductors with regard to offence
15 motivations. Most sexually motivated offenders appear to be male (60%; Boudreaux et al.,
16 1999) and acquaintances of the victim (Boudreaux et al., 1999; Erickson & Friendship, 2002;
17 Miller et al., 2008).
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20 In cases of NFA, the greatest concern for most parents is murder. Evidence from Warren et
21 al. (2021) suggests that CAM is less likely in cases where the child is held longer than 8
22 hours, suggesting that abductors who intend on murdering their victims are more likely to do
23 so shortly after the abduction. There is some evidence to suggest that fatality risks in
24 abductions could be predicted based on offence characteristics. Both Boudreaux et al.,
25 (1999) and Warren et al. (2021) found that CAM victims were more frequently school aged
26 (i.e., 6-13) and Caucasian, however, whilst Boudreaux and colleagues reported greater
27 fatality risks for girls, Warren et al did not find any significant differences between victim
28 gender. The studies also produced conflicting findings when comparing fatality rates by
29 offender-victim relationship. Within Boudreaux et al's., (1999) data, most CAMs were
30 perpetrated by strangers followed by acquaintances, however, evidence from Warren et al.
31 (2021) suggests that NFA were significantly less likely to end with a fatal outcome compared
32 to familial abductions. Irrespective of relationship type Warren and colleagues found that
33 abductions perpetrated by male offenders under the age of 29 were most likely to result in
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3 fatal outcomes. This coincides with research showing an over representation of men in
4 violent interpersonal crimes (Hoskin & Liftawi, 2022). The authors did not find any
5 associations between fatality outcomes and the offenders' ethnicity or arrest history.
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9 10 3.2.3. Offender Actions.

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12 **3.2.3.1. Aggressive vs Manipulative MO.** Collie & Greene (2017) identified two categories
13 of MO within UK cases of stranger abductions: aggressive and manipulative. An aggressive
14 MO was defined by the presence of physical and verbal aggression (77.3%). More
15 specifically, these offences were more likely to involve threats, assault, and show clear
16 evidence of a sexual motive. The use of a 'one liner' (offending speaking one line before
17 initiating the attack) was also correlated with aggressive behaviours suggesting that this
18 could be a precursor to the offender physically assaulting the victim. Linked to aggression,
19 Warren et al., (2016) did not find any gender differences regarding threats of lethality made
20 to the victim (approximately 40% for both male and female victims). Collie and Greene
21 (2017) also found that aggressive behaviours (64.71%) were more associated with
22 completed cases (cases are determined as completed when an offender is successful in
23 taking control of a victim), than manipulative approaches (37.04%). Collie and Greene also
24 identified a shift in some offenders' MO. Most cases with an evident shift (such as a
25 manipulative approach transitioning into an aggressive approach which featured in 94.2% of
26 cases) were associated with completed cases (70.5%). The inverse (an aggressive
27 approach transitioning to a manipulative approach) was less common (5.8%).
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47 **3.2.3.2. Weapon use.** Walsh et al., (2016) cite that 44% of all child abductions involved no
48 weapon. UK research suggests that stranger abductors adopting an aggressive MO are
49 more likely to bring weapons (such as a knife) to the crime scene, whereas those using a
50 manipulative MO are more likely to use personal weapons (e.g., hands and feet) (Collie &
51 Greene, 2019). US data also suggest that non-familial abductors generally bring a knife or a
52 gun to the offence (Asdigian et al., 1995; Walsh et al., 2016), however, in cases of non-fatal
53 abductions perpetrated by acquaintances, these are more likely to involve personal weapons
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3 (Miller et al., 2008; Walsh et al., 2016). Together, the findings suggest that physical weapons
4 are less likely to be used by acquaintance offenders or offenders adopting a manipulative
5 MO. Importantly, Tillyer et al., (2015) acknowledge that the presence of a weapon does not
6 necessarily equate to weapon use. For instance, a weapon may be utilised to force
7 compliance rather than to injure the victim.
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14 **3.2.3.3. Vehicle use.** Shelton et al., (2016) found that 55.6% of offenders in residential
15 abductions immediately placed their victim in a vehicle and drove off (55.6%). In these
16 cases, 60% of vehicles were owned by the offender, or were available to them through
17 routine access. Building on this research, Collie and Greene (2019) identified that vehicle
18 use was specifically associated with offenders who adopted a manipulative MO.
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25 **3.2.3.4. Sexual assault behaviours.** A manipulative approach, the use of physical force,
26 and the presence of a weapon have all been cited in the US literature as common variables
27 in offences which involve sexual assault (Asdigian et al., 1995). The types of sexual assault
28 identified during an abduction include; sexual maltreatment, photographing of the victim for
29 sexual purposes, and genital molestation (Walsh et al., 2016). According to Walsh et al.,
30 (2016), sexual assault during abductions is relatively rare (13%), however, sexual assault
31 appears to be more prevalent in CAM cases (23.4%), based on physical evidence recovered
32 from CAM victims (Brown & Keppel, 2012).
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43 Gallagher et al. (2008) found clear gender differences in sexual victimisation rates in UK
44 cases of stranger-abduction, with female victimisation for indecent exposure and touching,
45 being five times higher, and two times higher, respectively. However, no significant gender
46 differences were observed when multiple sexual acts were committed.
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52 In US kidnapping offences (i.e., abduction of victims aged 0-92), although sexual assault
53 was not typical in stranger kidnappings (10%), the odds of sexual victimisation were twice as
54 likely in stranger kidnappings (20%) compared to acquaintance kidnappings (10.5%), and
55 considerably more than in familial kidnapping cases (3.7%) (Tillyer et al., 2015). In addition,
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3 the authors found that kidnappings involving knives, multiple offenders, older offenders, male
4 offenders, both male and female offenders, and Black offenders were more likely to include
5 sexual victimisation. However, it should it should be acknowledged that the study included
6 cases of adult abduction.
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12 **3.2.3.5. Victim Injuries.** Walsh et al., (2016) report that injury in child abduction cases are
13 infrequent, with most victims not sustaining any injuries (85.3%) and only .1% ($n = 28$) of
14 abductions having a fatal outcome. These statistics, however, included cases of familial
15 abduction as well. The type and rate of injury was variable by victim-offender relationship
16 with minor injuries more likely to occur in cases of boyfriend/girlfriend, and familial
17 abductions in comparison to acquaintance and stranger abductions. However, major injuries
18 (such as severe lacerations, broken bones, and unconsciousness) were more likely to occur
19 in acquaintance abductions (24%) rather than familial abductions (4%; Walsh et al., 2016).
20 Further, Tillyer et al., (2015) found that injuries were more common amongst acquaintance
21 abductors (52.5%) in comparison to familial (39.1%) and stranger abductors (27.6%). This
22 risk of injury was associated with victims or offenders being older, the offender's use of
23 alcohol or drugs, and offences occurring in the daytime in semi-public locations. The study
24 found no significant differences in risk depending on gender (victim or offender) or whether
25 the offender operated alone or with an accomplice.
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42 **3.2.3.6. Mechanism of Death.** For murders in general, Brown and Keppel's (2012) US
43 research discusses how the most common evidence form originates from a weapon (39%),
44 however, in cases of CAM, evidence from weapons was less frequent (10.9%). Accordingly,
45 in most of the fatal abduction cases, the presence of asphyxiation was observed across both
46 victim genders (28% male and 42% female; 47.5%, Warren et al., 2020), with no significant
47 association between gender and cause of death. Strangulation appears to be more common
48 than suffocation and other unspecified forms, particularly amongst Caucasian male
49 offenders (Boudreaux et al., 1999). Female offenders, particularly of African American
50 descent, murdered both genders using blunt force trauma (46%), or firearms (Boudreaux et
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3 al., 1999). Caucasian offenders however tend to suffocate or strangle their victims (Beasley
4 et al., 2009; Boudreaux et al., 1999; Shelton et al., 2016). Suffocation specifically was more
5 prevalent amongst younger victims with rates decreasing as the victim gets older. As with
6 other causes of death evidenced in sexual murder, the trends in the general mechanism of
7 death suggest that asphyxiation is the preferred method, followed by blunt force trauma,
8 stabbing, and the use of firearms to kill victims (Beasley et al., 2009; Boudreaux et al., 1999;
9 Shelton et al., 2016; Warren et al., 2016).

21 4. Discussion

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24 **Key findings from the review are presented in table 3.** The current review was able to
25 identify patterns and differences in offence characteristics across acquaintance and stranger
26 abductors. However, our examination did highlight constraints which should be considered
27 in the context of the findings, some of which may be the result of existing policy and
28 therefore unavoidable. These constraints were evident in three key areas; Firstly, the
29 reviewed literature was mostly derived from US data sources. Child abductions are however
30 a global issue, and further research should therefore focus on child abductions in other
31 countries, inclusive of the UK. Secondly, the number of data sources, data collection
32 methods, and methods of analysis exceed the number of articles reviewed. This is due to
33 most research using mixed methodologies to collect and analyse data. Some studies
34 collated data from multiple complimentary sources (e.g., police case files and interviews with
35 investigating officers). However, due to the nature of how police data is recorded, the results
36 should be interpreted with caution. For example, it is unclear how systematic the recording
37 procedures are within databases such as the US NIBRS. Further, when abductions occur
38 alongside other offences, in the UK it is the most serious offence that is recorded in
39 accordance with crime recording procedures. Finally, it is noteworthy that most data
40 examined within this review is likely derived from high-profile cases which attracted
41 significant police and public interest, particularly in cases of CAM. The external validity of
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3 findings is therefore arguably not representative of child abductions in general. It should
4 also be noted that although other studies of child abduction exist within the literature (e.g.,
5 Newiss & Traynor, 2013), they did not meet the criteria for this review (see figure 1 for
6 reasons for exclusion).
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10 11 12 4.1. *Acquaintance and Stranger Abductors* 13

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15 Several motives of child abduction were identified, however, as Newiss and
16 Fairbrother (2004) cite, motives are often difficult to determine. To illustrate this difficulty,
17 sexual gratification was a dominant motive amongst offences perpetrated by acquaintances
18 but not strangers (Boudreaux et al., 1999; Erickson & Friendship, 2002; Tillyer et al., 2015).
19 However, a sexual motive might not be apparent in cases where an offender has touched a
20 victim or forced a victim to touch them. These offending actions may yield limited forensic
21 evidence which the police could otherwise use to infer a motive. Further, in non-fatal cases,
22 or cases where the victim was known by the offender, it is not uncommon for details of
23 sexual assaults to be withheld from the police. The victim's decision to not disclose such
24 details may be due to fear of not being believed, or apportioning blame to themselves
25 (Beckett & Warrington, 2014).
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39 It is noteworthy that whilst the demographic characteristics of victims were not the
40 subject of this review, findings related to victim age do appear broadly supportive of
41 Finkelhor and Leatherman's dependency continuum (see Finkelhor & Leatherman, 1994).
42 Finkelhor and Leatherman suggest that the level of supervision and care required for infants
43 and pre-school children reduces the opportunity for acquaintance or stranger abductors to
44 victimise infants and pre-school children. Rather, these offenders abduct older victims who,
45 by virtue of their age, are afforded more freedom and therefore present greater opportunities
46 for non-familial offenders.
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55 Strangers were identified as being more likely to bring a weapon (knife or firearm) to
56 the crime scene, and to use it in order to facilitate the offence, commit sexual assault
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3 (although sexual assault was not typical of stranger offenders), and/or to murder their victims
4 (Tillyer et al., 2015). However, these findings relate to kidnapping offences only, therefore
5 comparative research across non-fatal NFA and CAM cases is required to validate the
6 external validity of these findings. In addition, it was not possible to differentiate findings
7 related to child abduction from those related to kidnapping (>16) in Tillyer et al's (2015)
8 study. This non-differentiation of offence types is problematic when interpreting the findings,
9 however the findings do highlight similarities with the child abduction specific literature. To
10 illustrate, the taking of a weapon to the crime scene by strangers was an interesting finding,
11 as this may suggest a degree of intent or premeditation which are likely to have judicial
12 implications. Not surprisingly, weapon use also appeared to occur in parallel with the level
13 of injury inflicted on victims. Kidnappings perpetrated by strangers for example were more
14 likely to result in major injuries on their victims in comparison to strangers who commit
15 abduction (Tillyer et al., 2015). These findings accord with Collie and Greene's (2019)
16 findings which examined the offender's approach or MO (aggressive-manipulative
17 dichotomy). Building on these findings, strangers may use more aggressive tactics from the
18 onset of the offence, which includes the use of a weapon. As Tillyer et al., (2015) note
19 however, the presence of a weapon does not necessarily equate to weapon use. The use of
20 a weapon might be used to amplify threats to gain the compliance of the victim. It should
21 also be noted that Collie and Greene's (2019) study only examined stranger abductors,
22 therefore further research on UK cases comparing acquaintance and stranger offenders is
23 therefore required.

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48 In comparison to strangers who use a physical object as a weapon, acquaintances
49 who murdered their victims were more likely to use their hands or feet as weapons (Miller et
50 al., 2008; Walsh et al., 2016). The absence of weapons used in acquaintance abductions
51 derived from US samples might be due to them not requiring a weapon to commit the
52 offence. Offence completion and compliance is likely to be facilitated by the level of
53 familiarity between the victim and the offender, or some other interpersonal element.
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3 Therefore, the offender's ability to manipulate the victim using tactics such as luring them
4 into a vehicle does not necessarily require the use of a weapon. Interestingly however,
5 Walsh et al., (2016) describes how victims of acquaintance abduction are also likely to suffer
6 severe injuries. If acquaintances are more likely to use manipulative approaches and not
7 use weapons, the severity of victim injuries may be supportive of a shift in MO as noted by
8 Collie and Greene (2019). In comparison to a stranger who may use violence and force
9 from the onset of the offence or shift their MO at the site where the victim and offender
10 initially come into contact, or the abduction site (if different), the shift observed in
11 acquaintance abductions may be more likely to occur once the victim has been isolated. By
12 this time, any chance or means by which the victim could escape are likely to be limited.
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25 Consideration and identification of a likely victim-offender relationship is likely to carry
26 investigative implications. For example, in comparison to acquaintance abductors who may
27 be known not only to the victim, but by the victim's family or friends also, stranger abductors
28 are likely to present significant investigative difficulties, particularly in developing lines of
29 enquiry as they are likely to be an unknown entity. In cases of acquaintance abduction, lines
30 of enquiry may be comparatively easier to develop. From an academic perspective
31 however, it must be acknowledged that the victim-offender relationship may not always be
32 known, or recorded in police data, particularly in cases of CAM where this this information is
33 likely to be unknown, or reliant on the veracity of an offender's statement. Collectively, the
34 findings related to acquaintance and stranger abductors support the position of Asdigian et
35 al., (1995) who suggest that non-familial abductors are not a homogenous group of
36 offenders and should be studied independently. Therefore, research differentiating the two
37 types should continue to build on the existing literature with a deeper focus on the
38 relationships between offending actions, type of victim injury, victim-offender interaction, and
39 offender demographics.
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57 *4.2. Similarities and Differences between Non-fatal cases and CAM*

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3 Findings suggest that multiple offenders were more likely to be involved in cases of
4 CAM and cases of stereotypical kidnapping than in non-fatal cases. Operationalisation of
5 the term 'multiple offenders' however is somewhat ambiguous. This could relate to a second
6 offender responsible for assisting in the disposal of a body, or a second offender involved in
7 the process of abducting and murdering the victim. Differentiation of multiple offender
8 crimes is therefore likely to require an examination of 'degree of involvement', and
9 subsequent differentiation based on their own offending actions. Notwithstanding this gap in
10 the literature however, the presence of multiple offenders was also associated with sexual
11 assault, and sexual assault was present across both non-fatal kidnappings (Tillyer et al.,
12 2015) and cases of CAM (Browne & Keppel, 2012). Where forensic evidence supporting a
13 sexual motive was evident in cases of CAM, investigative questions remain. Specifically, it
14 would be difficult to determine whether the intent to harm or murder the victim was the
15 primary motive (offender gaining sexual gratification from the act of killing), or whether the
16 offender murdered the victim to dispose of a witness fearing exposure and apprehension.
17 Therefore, abduction outcome is an area in need of further empirical study as it is still
18 unclear under what circumstances a victim may be returned home unharmed, and what
19 offending actions may be predictive of fatal outcomes. Regarding weapon use, weapon
20 evidence was also more common than non-weapon evidence in cases of CAM (Brown &
21 Keppel, 2012). Given that strangers are more likely to murder their victims, take weapons to
22 the offence, and use more aggressive tactics, this was expected. From an operational
23 perspective, the likelihood of acquiring forensic evidence from murders in general, might
24 cause subsequent dependency on it to solve CAM cases in which weapon evidence is
25 reportedly lower. In cases where evidence is limited or non-recoverable, this creates a
26 significant issue. This is exemplified in cases whereby investigators may have identified a
27 weapon at crime scene but are unable to extract forensic evidence. As Tillyer et al., (2015)
28 suggest, this may be the result of a weapon used to threaten or force the victim into
29 compliance rather than to inflict injury. It is also noteworthy that literature relating to CAM
30 cases is limited in comparison to the general child abduction literature, and has emerged
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3 exclusively from the US. Research on UK specific CAM cases is therefore required in order
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5 to advance knowledge in this area and to determine the external validity of US findings.
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8 *4.3. Consistencies and Inconsistencies in UK and US Research*

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11 The prevalence of victim-offender relationship type is an area of inconsistency in the
12 UK and US literature. Statistics suggest that NFA is the most prevalent abduction type in the
13 UK, and US statistics suggest that familial abduction is more prevalent. This difference may
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15 in part be due to under-reporting of familial abductions in the UK due to the perceived
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17 seriousness of the offences. Perceptions may result in a preference to resolve cases in a
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19 civil court rather than a criminal court. Consistencies across the UK and US literature are
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21 however identifiable regarding variables such as sexual motivation and weapon use.
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23 However, characteristics such as the number of victims and offenders involved have been
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25 inconsistent. In the US, it appears that most child abductions were committed when the
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27 child was alone. The only notable exception is cases of residential child abduction (see
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29 Shelton et al., 2016). Contrasting UK research however suggests that child abductions
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31 perpetrated in the presence of another child occurred in two thirds of cases (Gallagher et al.,
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33 2008). However, these findings were more likely the result of a research focus on both
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35 sexual assault and child abductions rather than child abductions exclusively. These
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37 differences may also be due to geography. In comparison to the geographical dispersion in
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39 some areas of the US, which may result in children being driven to school or using school
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41 transportation, in UK urban areas, most children are likely to live in closer proximity and walk
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43 to school with friends. Further, UK findings also suggest that most NFA involve a lone
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45 offender whereas US findings suggested that NFA and CAM were often perpetrated by
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47 multiple offenders. It is unclear as to why this difference exists and therefore requires further
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49 empirical exploration. Despite inconsistencies however, researchers examining child
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51 abduction cases in the UK and US have adopted similar approaches in their proposed
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53 typologies based on factors such as offender motivation and victim-offender relationship. It
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55 should be noted that these typologies require updating as they do not consider the use of
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3 social media to facilitate abduction offences, an area which is unexplored and completely
4 absent in the existing child abduction literature. Definitions of victim-offender relationship
5 were also problematic. The term acquaintance for example has been inconsistently defined
6 across the UK and US literature, and acquaintance and stranger offenders have occasionally
7 been categorised under the broader category of NFA. It is the authors' position that
8 standardisation of terms is key in developing understanding and consistency across studies
9 in this field. It is however acknowledged that in crime recording procedures this data may be
10 missing or unknown. Finally, the majority of the literature on NFA has emerged from the US,
11 specifically in CAM cases where research is exclusive to the US. Neglecting to investigate
12 CAM cases from a from other countries arguably limits the understanding of child abduction
13 offences from a cross-cultural perspective. Therefore, further interest and empirical
14 examination is required.

29 *4.4. Limitations of reviewed studies*

32 There are several limitations in the way studies have operationalised NFA, and the
33 numerous variables they have been examined. One of the main issues surrounds non-
34 random sampling methods, however given the complexity of child abduction cases, this is
35 somewhat unavoidable. Even with samples derived from official sources, attention is drawn
36 to the issue of missing data relating to variables such as victim gender. This issue of
37 missing data was evident in 23% of cases in Erickson and Friendship's UK study (Erickson &
38 Friendship, 2002). Some studies also have an over-representation of female victims
39 (Gallagher et al, 2008). As some abductions such as attempts, or completed cases involving
40 sexual assault may go unreported, recorded abductions are arguably not representative of
41 all cases. Some researchers have also limited the scope of their study to include cases with
42 a sexual motive only. Restricting the sample to sexual violence and sexual offending only
43 limits the external validity of findings, particularly in relation to other motives involved in child
44 abduction offences. However, the findings related to sexual motives are still useful in
45 highlighting the links between the literature on sexual offending and child abduction.

4.5. *Limitations of current review*

The current review constitutes a significant contribution to the knowledge of NFA. However, there were some limitations. Firstly, the search was limited to research that had been written in English, which could have resulted in useful evidence being left out of the review. Second, the review only included evidence from articles that were either peer-reviewed (including examined grey literature). This was done to ensure that all recommendations put forward in the discussion were devised from reliable research. However, this ultimately led to a reduction in potentially useful evidence and an increased risk of publication bias within the results (Perestelo-Pérez, 2013).

4.6. *Future directions*

Due to the limited literature on NFA and CAM cases outside of the US, this is an area in need of cross-cultural research. To assist police forces in identifying the likely victim-offender relationship with the aim of facilitating refined lines of enquiry, researchers should consider what information, operationally is likely to be available to the police at the onset of a NFA case. This may include a limited number of victim characteristics such as age, gender, and ethnicity. Further exploration of how these victim characteristics relate to the victim-offender relationship is warranted. If for example an acquaintance is identified as the likely offender, a refined investigative strategy centred on collecting information from the victim's family and social associates, rather than door to door canvassing of a specific geographic location, might facilitate the identification of potential suspects, or, refine a pre-existing suspect pool. Conversely, consideration should be given to research which adopts an inverse approach, that is, when the deceased body of an abducted child is found.

Research examining types and extent of victim injury, and other observable characteristics at a crime scene (including geo-spatial patterns, see Willmott et al., 2021), should also be examined to determine if they have applicability in determining the victim-offender relationship. Research on the latter may also prove useful in developing themes of offending

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3 and the determination of other offender characteristics (Mann et al. 2020). Further, in order
4 to identify risk factors of fatal outcomes, attention should be focussed on differentiating non-
5 fatal and fatal victim, offender and offence characteristics whilst controlling for the victim-
6 offender relationship.
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12 Regarding fatal cases, the terms acquaintance and stranger need to be standardised in
13 order to maintain clarity in the interpretation of findings from any subsequent studies. As
14 well as advancing the UK knowledge base in this area, this research would serve several
15 purposes. Firstly, it would be the first research of its kind to examine cases of CAM from an
16 UK perspective. Secondly, it would indicate whether the existing US findings could be
17 applied to international cases, and thirdly, it would build on the existing US literature. As
18 discussed, victim selection also presents a gap in the literature, however research in this
19 area would require access to a clinical or forensic sample. Such research may be achieved
20 by using a qualitative approach (e.g., Filkin et al., 2022) from which themes in victim
21 acquisition can be explored. Finally, to gain further insight into the motives and psychological
22 antecedents child abductions, clinical research should study the role of dark traits (e.g.,
23 psychopathy) and criminal cognitions (Deblasio et al., 2023; Liley et al., 2023) within NFA
24 samples.
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44 **5. Conclusions**

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46 This review is the first to synthesise research related to the behavioural
47 characteristics associated with acquaintance and stranger abduction in general, and CAM
48 cases. In conducting this review, clear gaps in the knowledge base were identified, as well
49 as potential improvements for policy and practice which if improved, could lead to more
50 meaningful empirical investigation. The broad spectrum of offences that occur in the context
51 of CAM cases, and the effect these have on the victim's family, and investigating forces,
52 support the rationale for continued empirical study in this area.
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Table 1.*Bibliometric properties of the articles included in the systematic review.*

| Descriptive Variable | <i>f</i> | % |
|---|----------|------|
| Year of Publication | | |
| 1995 | 1 | 6.2 |
| 1999 | 1 | 6.2 |
| 2002 | 1 | 6.2 |
| 2003 | 1 | 6.2 |
| 2008 | 2 | 12.5 |
| 2009 | 1 | 6.2 |
| 2012 | 1 | 6.2 |
| 2015 | 1 | 6.2 |
| 2016 | 3 | 18.8 |
| 2017 | 1 | 6.2 |
| 2019 | 2 | 12.5 |
| 2021 | 1 | 6.2 |
| Journal | | |
| Aggression and Violent Behaviour | 3 | 18.8 |
| Journal of Forensic Science | 2 | 12.5 |
| Child Abuse and Neglect | 2 | 12.5 |
| Legal and Criminological Society | 1 | 6.2 |
| Behavioral Science & the Law | 1 | 6.2 |
| Criminal Justice Studies | 1 | 6.2 |
| Justice Quarterly | 1 | 6.2 |
| Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling | 1 | 6.2 |
| Interpersonal Violence | 1 | 6.2 |
| Law and Psychiatry | 1 | 6.2 |
| Criminal Justice | 1 | 6.2 |
| Criminal Justice and Behaviour | 1 | 6.2 |

Table 2.

Methodological characteristics of the articles included in the systematic review (N=16).

| Author | Sample Country | Sample N | Victim age range | Victim gender (female %) | Offender gender (male%) | Date Parameters | Data Source |
|---------------------------------|----------------|----------|------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|---|
| Asdigian et al. (1995)* | US | 396 | <12 & >12 | 71/81 | 95/53 | 1987-1988 | LE reporting. |
| Boudreaux et al. (1999) | US | 540 | <1-17 | 70% | 87 | 1985-1999 | FBI's NCAVC, VICAP, and the Child Abduction and Serial Killer Unit (CASKU), telephone interviews with the lead investigators. |
| Erickson and Friendship (2002) | UK | 149 | na | 62 | na | 1993-1995 | Offenders index, Police Records at New Scotland Yard |
| Beyer and Beasley (2003) | US | 25 | na | na | 100 | na | A review of state and prison records, interviews with offenders identified through VICAP, anecdotal reports from LE, a review of case documents including criminal, medical, and psychological reports. |
| Gallagher et al. (2008) | UK | 2420 | 9-16 | 71 | 88 | 1996-1997 | Children in schools across NW England |
| Miller et al. (2008) | US | 671 | 0-17 | 60 | 80 | 1991-1996 | LE case files in the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) system. |
| Beasley et al. (2009) | US | 750 | na | 77 | 94 | na | FBI's ViCAP, KASA, and the National Crime Information Centre (NCIC) |
| Tillyer et al. (2015) | US | 9920 | 0-92 | 75 | 84 | 2011 | NIBRS. |
| Shelton et al. (2016) | US | 32 | <1-17 | 88 | 92 | 1981-2012 | Behavioral Analysis Unit III – Crimes Against Children unpublished study, FBI's internal case management database, and local and state law enforcement agencies |
| Warren et al. (2016) | US | 463 | 0-17 | 80 | 94 | na | FBI's National Centre for Violent Crime Analysis (NCAVC), Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (VICAP), Kidnapping Abduction Statistical Program (KASA) |
| Walsh et al. (2016) | US | 29,293 | <5-17 | 61 | 72 | 1995-2013 | National Incidence Based Reporting System (NIBRS). |
| Collie and Greene (2017 & 2019) | UK | 78 | 0-17 | 54 | 100 | 1988-2014 | Open source media articles and court transcripts (Westlaw and Lexis legal databases). |
| Warren et al. (2021) | US | 556 | 0-17 | 80 | 94 | na | ViCAP, KASA, and NCIC. |

| | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------|-----|-----------|----|----|-----------|---|
| Park and Cho (2019) | South Korea | 144 | <10 & >10 | 65 | 68 | 1997-2008 | Korean Social Science Data Archive (A1-2009-0114) |
| Brown and Keppel (2012) | US | 733 | na | na | na | 1968-2002 | US Office for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention |

Note: *Victim/offender gender presented for stereotypical/non-stereotypical cases (respectively); NA = not available

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Table 3.*Key findings from systematic literature review*

Key findings

There is a gap of research comparing stranger and acquaintance abductor characteristics. Such research could provide valuable insight for initial investigative inquiries.

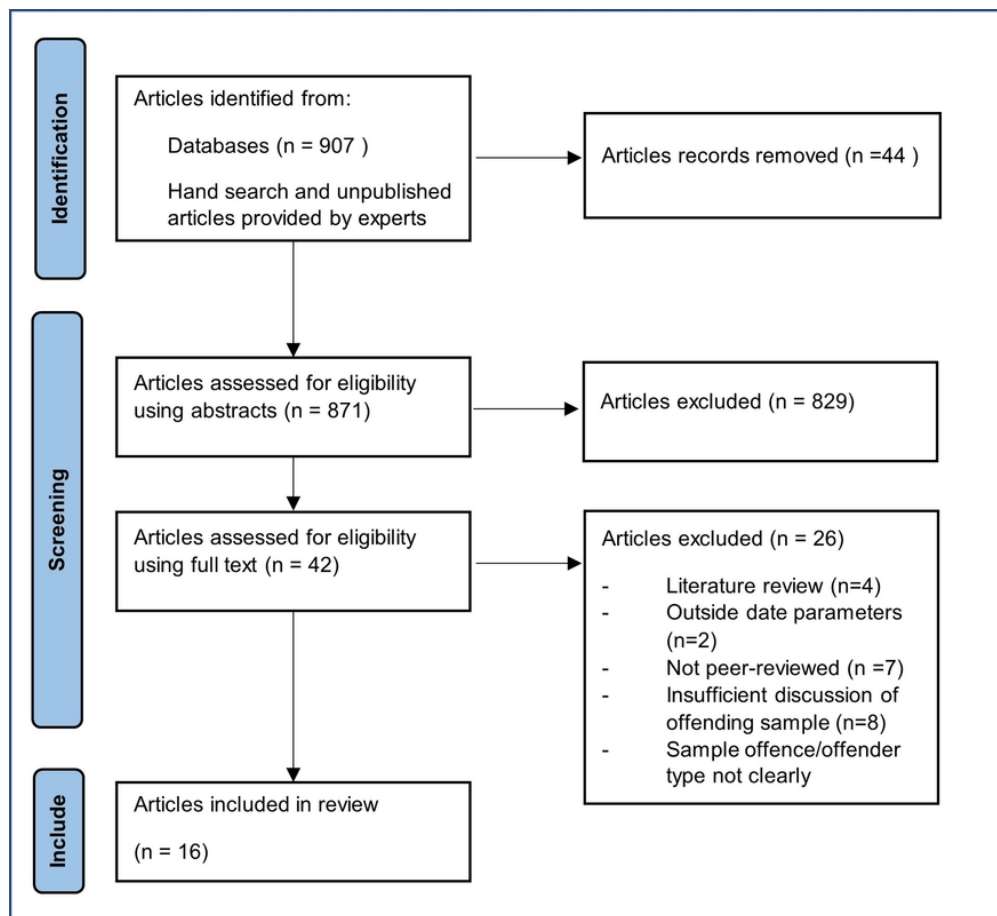
Findings suggest that non-familial abductors are not a homogenous group of offenders (e.g., risk of violence and use of weapons) and should be studied independently (i.e., relationship type).

Majority of child abductions perpetrated by men and sexually motivated. Female abductors are highly likely to co-offend with a male accomplice, though some do engage in lone abductions, often motivated by maternal desire.

Evidence of some differences between US and UK offences (e.g., prevalence of relationship types, lone vs multiple offenders, and whether the victim is abducted in the presence of others). Yet there is a paucity of empirical investigation outside of the US, highlighting a need for further cross-cultural research.

Abductions perpetrated by multiple offenders are more likely to involve sexual assault and/or CAM. However, the role and level of involvement each offender plays is not considered within the existing literature.

The risk of murder is greater in cases involving children aged 6-13 and perpetrators aged under 29. There is conflicting evidence regarding other risk factors (e.g., gender and relationship type). Further, there is limited research on the motivations behind CAM, as well as examinations of CAM cases outside of the US, signalling a need for further research on CAM.



Process of sample selection

148x135mm (150 x 150 DPI)

Title Page Information

Title: Understanding the Complexities of Non-Familial **Child Abductions: A Systematic Literature Review on the Behavioural Characteristics of Acquaintance and Stranger Abductors.**

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Funding information: This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

| Reviewers' Comments | Authors' response |
|--|--|
| Editors Comment | |
| <p>. I would also like to draw the author's attention to three publications not currently cited in the manuscript that they would benefit from making a brief reference to in their literature review all of which give some consideration of offender motivations for their crimes which would make for a useful addition within the current manuscript; Hoskin & Liftawi (2022) doi.org/10.1108/JCP-01-2022-0003 who examine the link between gender, violent offending and interest in physical danger; Zara et al (2022) doi.org/10.1108/JCP-04-2022-0010 who examine the role of moral judgments and reasoning among offenders as a cause of their offending behaviour and Filkin et al (2022) DOI: 10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e09762 who also examine offender motivations from their criminality.</p> | <p>We thank the editor for the suggestions. We have implemented the work of Hoskin & Liftawi (2002) and Filkin et al in our work. However, moral decision making does not relate to the present aims at all, and it would be wide speculation to suggest so.</p> |
| Reviewer 1 | |
| <p>On page 4, the word 'determining' might be more accurate/appropriate than the word extrapolating.</p> | <p>'Determining' now replaces 'extrapolating'.</p> |
| <p>The third sentence of paragraph 2 on page 4 is very long. Consider re-writing.</p> | <p>This sentence has now been broken up into three smaller sentences</p> |
| <p>Consider providing the definition of 'one liner' given by Collie and Greene (2019) on page 13.</p> | <p>There are no direct examples of one liners, Collie and Greene used this term to describe an offender who spoke briefly (one line of discourse) prior to initiating their attack. This explanation has now been provided in the text.</p> |
| <p>Re-write the first sentence of the last paragraph on page 14. 'Resulted' should perhaps be 'resulting'.</p> | <p>The sentence has been edited and 'resulted' has been changed.</p> |
| <p>Consider specifying why Newiss and Traynor (2013) did not meet the criteria for this review</p> | <p>We have signposted the reader to the amended figure 1 which now explains why certain studies were excluded. Newiss and Traynor (2013) was excluded due to not being rigorously peer-reviewed. However, given the word limit restrictions, we did not feel that a direct explanation for the exclusion of this study was needed. Especially given that other excluded studies were not directly linked to a specific reason.</p> |
| <p>Please number the subheadings in the introduction section of the paper and ensure they are formatted correctly.</p> | <p>All headings have been edited for consistency.</p> |
| <p>There are a number of typographical errors (x8)</p> | <p>All typos have been corrected.</p> |
| Reviewer 2 | |
| <p>It should be clearly stated that the study focuses on child abductions.</p> | <p>The title and abstract now explicitly specify that the study focuses on child abductions</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>P. 3, lines 39-41: The authors state that some cases of child abductions go unreported. This is an interesting issue and I was wondering whether the authors could list some reasons for not reporting child abductions.</p> | <p>We have now provided an explanation for underreported abductions with an appropriate reference</p> |
| <p>P. 4, line 38: Remove the word “likely”</p> | <p>Word has been removed</p> |
| <p>Only UK statistics are provided although the review includes studies with data beyond this one country. It would be beneficial to extend this part of the introduction with data from other parts of the world (or at least some data from the US).</p> | <p>The introduction now provides both US and UK incidence rates</p> |
| <p>Figure 1: It is not clear how many articles were assessed for eligibility using abstracts and full texts – please include numbers in appropriate boxes. Also, please indicate specific reasons for excluding papers where full texts were inspected.</p> | <p>The two boxes in figure 1 indicate the number of articles that were excluded at the first (using abstracts and titles) and second (using full text). We have added more information to break down the reasoning behind the exclusion process at stage 2 (using full text)</p> |
| <p>Table 2 should contain more details. For example, please provide more information on the type of abductors (acquaintance vs. stranger, or both) included in the sample, age range of victims, sample gender composition (abductors and victims).</p> | <p>Additional columns have been added to table 2 to present sample composition (age range, victim and offender gender distribution). We chose not to include information about the type of abductors because studies used different typology systems - explaining this within a table would have been confusing. However, our results section describes the different typologies used and all studies have been cited in this section to show which relationship types each study considered.</p> |
| <p>In the introduction, the authors list three aims of the study: (1) to identify what similarities and differences exist in the offence characteristics of the two sub-types acquaintance and stranger abductors; (2) to highlight the similarities and differences and differences in the offence characteristics of non-fatal and fatal abductions; (3) to highlight consistencies and inconsistencies between the US and UK literature, and any other countries identified in the literature search. Empirical findings, in turn, are centred around the following themes: offender-victim dynamic, motive, and offender actions. I suggest restructuring of the results section to be more reflective of the study aims. This will render the manuscript clearer to the readers.</p> | <p>This is a logical suggestion and it is the approach we initially intended to take, however, after data synthesis, it became apparent that it would not be possible to do this without comprising the legibility of the writing. That is, if we were to first present results on differences between relationship type, followed by a section on differences between fatal and non-fatal abductions, and finally discussing cultural differences, there would be numerous instances where the same finding from a past study is brought up and discussed (repetition). This is because much of the differences relating to the factors above are interconnected. The research team, therefore, decided that the most suitable option would be to present the findings in relation to the empirical themes identified and relate the findings back to the aims in our discussion.</p> |
| <p>Section 4.4 Limitations: Here, the researchers should refer to the limitations of their research, not the limitations of the reviewed studies.</p> | <p>The authors now discuss limitations of the actual review</p> |

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4 I suggest including a subsection with the most
5 important findings of the current review.
6 Alternatively, the authors may consider
7 preparing a table with study highlights

An additional table (table 3) has been added to
the discussion and serves to summarise the key
findings from the review

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3 **Acknowledgements**
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5
6 We thank Dr Craig Collie (University of Portsmouth), and Geoff Newiss (Director of Action
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8 Against Abduction) for providing useful discussion and email communication.
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