

# Aggressive and violent abductors are found to be more equipped to abduct children

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The more violent and prepared a would-be child abductor is, the more vulnerable victims are to being taken, new research has found.

Manipulative abductors, who offer incentives and friendship, were found to be less likely to complete their attempted abduction. Aggressive abductors, who display violence and threatening behaviour, are most likely to complete an abduction.

But, the researchers warn, even manipulative abductors can turn aggressive.

Dr. Craig Collie and Dr. Karen Shalev-Greene from the Centre for the Study of Missing Persons, part of the Institute of Criminal Justice Studies at the University of Portsmouth, examined the many and varied methods of men who carry out stranger [child](#) abduction cases in the UK.

Stranger [child abduction](#) cases are relatively rare, with most recent figures indicating that 247 stranger abduction cases were reported to the police in 2013.

The small-scale study focused on 78 cases between 1988 and 2014. Most cases occurred after 2000.

Dr. Collie said: "Child abduction by a stranger is one of those crimes that captures the public imagination, but is actually quite rare, hence the large time period studied.

"It is certainly under-researched; we don't really know that much about it, with a lot of our existing knowledge being based on assumption rather than concrete research.

"This study goes some way to building a picture of how this specific type of offender behaves and examines how well these assumptions hold up."

The study found that offenders were capable of changing their modus operandi (MO). Around 70.5 per cent of cases featuring a "shift" in MO, where an offender most typically moves from a manipulative approach to an aggressive approach, resulted in a child being abducted.

Only one case saw the reverse, where the [offender](#) utilised an aggressive approach which failed, before shifting to a manipulative approach. In this case, the victim was able to find help to prevent themselves from being abducted.

The researchers studied only male offenders who had abducted or attempted to abduct a child, because male offenders were likely to be driven by sexual or violent motives.

Female offenders were almost exclusively motivated by maternal desire, the researchers said.

The research, published in the Journal of Investigative Psychology and Offender Profiling, found that offenders who utilise all means at their disposal and who resort to overwhelming physical, aggressive control tactics were more likely to abduct victims.

Most young children are taught not to talk to strangers, but how can we educate children against aggressive, potentially weapon-wielding abductors?

Dr. Collie said: "We need to think about the next steps we take when educating children. We need to move away from the 'stranger danger' narrative and start focusing on educating children on what to do when they feel uncomfortable in a situation.

"The most important thing is to avoid alarming children. The vast majority of adults are actually safe, and teaching children to avoid all strangers removes a potential source of protection and safety.

"At the same time, any adult, whether they are a [stranger](#), acquaintance or someone well known, can be a threat.

"It will be crucial to educate [children](#) to recognise when a situation is not quite right, regardless of relationship, and on how to remove themselves from these dangerous situations when they arise."

In total, the research examined 83 victims and 65 percent of cases were completed abductions. The majority of victims were aged either between 0 to 10 years old or 11 to 14 years old. Only eight victims were aged 15 to 17 years old.

Completed abduction cases involved proportionately far more instances of weapon and tool use than attempted cases, as well as the presence of multiple, aggressive approaches.

Manipulative offenders were most likely to use incentives when attempting to abduct a child and aggressive offenders were most likely to use physical means.

The research found that highly aggressive offenders who utilised multiple means of aggressive control are more likely to complete an abduction than those offenders utilising only manipulative means.

Provided by University of Portsmouth

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