

Missing people fall through the cracks after government cuts

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Police forces in England say the potential for significant harm to people who go missing is rising after decades of cuts to police budgets, rising demand and lack of training.

In the first report to examine whether swinging cuts to [police](#) budgets introduced since 2010 have had any impact on missing people investigations, the authors found significant risk of harm.

The number of people who go missing in the UK every year is around 150,000 generating over 300,000 missing person reports to police.

A fifth of [police officers](#) polled said they had received no training in missing people investigations, with some saying this risked their ability to perform well.

Report authors Dr. Karen Shalev Greene, director of the Centre for the Study of Missing Persons at the University of Portsmouth, and Mark Greenhalgh, [published their findings](#) today (8 September 2021).

They polled 373 police officers and staff and found a mixture of low morale, lack of training, too few staff and poor-quality investigations.

Dr. Shalev Greene said: "We found overwhelming evidence among police officers and staff at all levels around the lack of robust training in handling missing people investigations.

"Demand on the police outstrips supply of officers consistently, in every department for almost every type of crime, but it appears to be particularly acute for missing people investigations.

"Police resources are allocated according to the degree of threat, risk and harm, but this doesn't appear to be translated to missing people investigations. People who go missing can be at very high risk of harm, but the numbers just aren't there to protect them."

The report found some officers are assigned to work on more than 30 missing person cases a week, and Dr. Shalev Greene says it's only a

matter of time before a shortage of resources means someone comes to serious harm.

There was overwhelming support among those questioned for forces to have dedicated missing people teams, which are highly trained and have a clear line of accountability.

Dr. Shalev Greene has more than a decade's experience researching missing people and has published many studies on the need for multi-agency work—[social workers](#), [health professionals](#), [local authorities](#) and police—to allow them to get upstream of the problem.

She said: "It's disappointing to hear that while many in the police can see the sense in working upstream, preventing high-risk people from going missing in the first place, most say their own force doesn't have the resources and is always on the back foot.

"It's not just those who go missing who are at increased risk of coming to harm, police officers themselves are feeling exposed, their own wellbeing is threatened and many talked of burnout."

Historically, the police service in England and Wales had sustained growth, outstripping the growth of the general population. That ended in 2010 when a government spending review called for a 20 per cent cut in police funding. By 2018, there had been an 18 per cent reduction in the police workforce.

Provided by University of Portsmouth

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