

Multi-agency responses to missing children investigations

What factors facilitate and hinder multi-agency working in a missing child investigation and ways collaboration can be improved.

Key details

Lead institution	University of Liverpool
Principal researcher(s)	Paige Monaghan, Dr Sara Waring, Dr Susan Giles and Dr Freya O'Brien p.m.monaghan@liverpool.ac.uk
Police region	North West
Level of research	PhD
Project start date	October 2022
Date due for completion	December 2026

Research context

This PhD research focuses on multi-agency responses to missing children investigations, with the aim of improving outcomes through more effective and evidence-based collaboration. Missing children cases are complex and require coordinated responses across various services, including police, social care, education and health. This project examines how these agencies work together in practice, what challenges they encounter, and what facilitates successful joint working.

The research is rooted in qualitative methodology and involves three key stages:

- a scoping literature review conducted to identify existing knowledge, best practices and policy frameworks around multi-agency safeguarding, both within the UK and internationally

- semi-structured interviews conducted with police officers, local authority representatives and other safeguarding professionals to explore their experiences of collaboration in real-world cases
- undertaking qualitative outcome evaluation of multi-agency processes, aiming to identify how organisations measure success in multi-agency working in missing children investigations, and if not, what data is needed to successfully measure this in the future

Research methodology

Using a qualitative methodology which involves:

- a [scoping literature review](#) exploring international and UK-based practices in multi-agency responses to missing children
- [semi-structured interviews](#) with professionals across policing and partner agencies
- a qualitative outcome evaluation to assess how agencies define and measure 'success' in multi-agency working. This includes identifying gaps in current data practices and proposing ways to improve the evidence base recommendations

Interim reports or publications

Monaghan P and others. 2026. 'Examining mechanisms that facilitate and hinder multi-agency working in missing children's investigations: An in-depth policing perspective'. The Police Journal: Theory, Practice and Principles. [Read open access article](#)

Monaghan P. and others. 2024. 'What works in improving inter-agency responses to missing children investigations: A scoping review.' The Police Journal, 98(1), pp 87–111. [Read open access article](#)

Waring S and others. 2023. 'Examining what factors affect inter-agency working in missing children investigations.' Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice, 17, paad044. [Read open access article](#)

Waring S and others. 2023. 'Examining the Impact of Dedicated Missing Person Teams on the Multiagency Response to Missing Children.' Cambridge Journal of Evidence Based Policing, 7(5). [Read open access article](#)

Additional resources

Welsh Parliament. December 2024. Children, Young People and Education Committee. [Children on the margins.](#)